

## Introduction

Welcome. I am excited to present this curated collection of articles from my blog. I have long felt these articles are tied together and should be read in order. I believe they provide a solid foundation for planning in ASL. I am under no illusion this is the ONLY way. Only Mandalorians have The Way, and as much as I would like to be one, I am no Mandalorian 😊

I began my blog on a whim. I had just retired, and I had some time. There was a discussion on social media about how to properly conduct a Gun Duel when I flippantly suggested I should write an article about it. My friend Bill Stopples encouraged me to do just that. That was 18 months ago as I write this, and I have written over 80 articles since. Most are published on my blog, but others have appeared in the ASL Journal, Banzai!, A View from the Trenches, and Hazardous Movement's Horizon.

Topics selected during that period have been haphazard. Readers would suggest a topic, or I would notice someone playing something wrong or struggling with a concept and it would provide fodder for a new article. There wasn't much rhyme or reason to the order of presentation. This will probably always be the case. My interests in ASL are all over the place. But with this random presentation, opportunities for deeper teaching have been missed.

As I wrote more and thought more about what I was writing, it became clear to me there was an unspoken methodology presented throughout my writing and ASL play. I first began to put this down in my ASL Maxims article. It still hadn't hit me just how foundational this was.

That occurred while writing *Fortifications in ASL*. At that point, I noticed I was referring to the Maxims article rather than repeating myself. I suggested the reader go back and read that article if they were confused because that article outlined my reasoning. At this point, I knew I was on to something.

Next, I penned *Defenses in ASL*. This article came after Toby Piling's seminal article in *From the Cellar*. I was working on my article when Toby's was published. I had not read his until after I completed mine. Still, his came first. What was interesting to me is how similar our approaches to Defense were. We used different words to describe what we were doing, but generally we had the same approach.

What sets mine apart is my background in software development. To me, Defending is all about patterns. Recognizing objectives, recognizing the proper terrain, recognizing you have the assets to apply the pattern. The pattern helps to answer questions like "when should I begin my withdrawal?"; "How do I divide my resources?"; "Where do I place my SW?" Patterns allow you to break the goal, fulfilling the VC and winning the game, into smaller, discrete tasks. They allow you to then properly assign resources towards solving those tasks. If you solve the tasks, you reach the goal, you win. And since patterns are broadly applicable, you learn a pattern once and apply it many times, just like in programming.

The final article in this series was *Attacking in ASL*. I wrote this one with a nudge from Toby Piling. Sadly, it isn't as pattern-based as the defending article. Defending is about reacting. It is about trying to dictate the ground. Patterns make sense in defending. Attacking is about initiative. It is about dictating the point of attack and destroying your enemy in detail. Attacking MAKES something happen. Attacking is a participation sport. Still, the Maxims article provided a good basis for describing an attacking methodology. It all began to make sense.

Still, it is important to note this is all just my opinion and my thoughts on the subject. There are just as many “right” ways as there are “wrong” ways (although there remains only one Pete “Wrongway” Shelling). This works for me and makes sense as a systematic approach to planning in ASL. It may not work for you. You may even take strong exception with everything I say here. All I know for certain is this works for me and has worked for me for some time. I continue to evolve as I play so my thinking may change in the future, but for this moment in time, what I present here works for me. I think it may work for you too.

I have distilled three decades of my own learning into this single document. It covers a basic framework and how to apply that framework to defending, fortifications, and attacking in ASL. I am convinced this can significantly help new players formulate their own approach to ASL. I am excited to bring it to you collated in this single publication. I hope by the end you can see how all these articles are tied together into one consistent framework. I hope it brings you as much success and enjoyment of ASL as it has me.

**Editor’s Note:** This first article is the basis for all other articles in this collection. These Maxims are the foundation of my ASL play. Whether I am attacking, defending, or speaking about some aspect of ASL, these are always present in my thinking. These Maxims help to focus my thinking and form a framework around which I make decisions when playing ASL. In my opinion, this is the most important article in this collection. As you read through the other articles presented here, you will see I constantly refer to the ideas presented here.

## My ASL Tactical Maxims



This is the first in what may become a series on tactical tips. For this to happen a couple of things need to be said right up front. There is ALWAYS more than one way to do things. Some ways are “more right” than others, but even “wrong” decisions can work. On top of that, I don’t claim to be the best player in the world. At any given time, my player rating is 1700 +/- 100 points according to [ASL Player Ratings](#). This isn’t to say I can’t offer good, sound, tactical advice, but I am acknowledging right up front many others are at least as qualified, some even more so.

At the conclusion of this article, I hope you understand the framework I use to approach a scenario. I will refer to these maxims in future articles covering tactics. Sometimes I will obey them, sometimes I will bend them, and sometimes I will outright ignore them. Unlike many of my previous articles, this one is based almost entirely on opinion so *caveat emptor*. Let’s get started.

### My ASL Maxims

There are few maxims in ASL. I personally have four, but to be completely honest, these are a bastardized form of an old US military mission planning acronym, [METT-I](#). Without further ado, my ASL maxims are:

1. **Victory Conditions:** the mission, defines success above all else
2. **Terrain:** the canvas upon which our mission plays out



3. **Time:** the fixed limits within which we must accomplish our mission
4. **Order of Battle:** the resources available to fulfill requirements

Number one drives my decision making. The other three are constraints, focusing my efforts to accomplish number one. Combined, these things drive my setup and game play. Let's look at how these work for me and see if they might work for you.

## The Zeroth Maxim

Let's get something straight. Playing to win and playing for fun are not mutually exclusive. "I only play casually." "I only play for fun." Hearing this honestly drives me crazy. You can play to win and still have fun and be a good sport. You can play to win and still be fun to play ASL with. Trying to do your best and working hard to win doesn't take the fun out of the game. Bad behavior takes the fun out of the game no matter who is winning or losing.

## Victory Conditions

Victory conditions define success or failure. Fulfill them and you win; fail and you lose. Every action and decision you make should be a step towards fulfilling them. They should ever be forefront in your mind. If the Victory Conditions (VC) don't require a unit left at the end, sacrificing everything for victory is a viable option. If the VC doesn't require you to have a tank left at game end, why are you worried about it dying? If the tank is destroyed in a way that helps you meet the VC, its destruction is a step in the right direction. The same goes for any other piece of your OB. If it's being used to fulfill the VC it is being used properly.

While we are speaking of VC, make sure you understand what it takes to fulfill the VC. It's not enough to know you need to Control building X. You need to know **how** to control it. The same goes for every other type of control condition. Failure to do so makes deliberately fulfilling the VC remarkably more difficult.

I once won a game against Sean Deller, and I didn't have a single piece left on the board. As the DEFENDER, my only requirement to win was to deny Sean control of some huts. Having something alive at the end wasn't a requirement. Every leader, every MMC, every bit of my OB was gone or malfunctioned at game end, but I still won. In the end, Sean just couldn't get to where he needed to be to control the huts and that was all that mattered. VC above all else.

## Terrain

It's no accident I placed terrain second on the list. IMO, it is only slightly less important than VC in determining victory. Terrain is the stage on which our play is performed. It determines the pace at which we move across the

board. Some piece of it often defines our objective. It limits the room we must maneuver in. It determines the area we set up in. “Fast-go” terrain we can cover it quickly. “Slow-go” terrain will take more time to cross. “No-go” terrain blocks our movement. This constrains the ways we move across the battlefield and influences our ability to fulfill the VC.

Terrain also limits the ways we can project firepower. Some of it we can take under direct observation, and thus direct fire. Some of it we cannot. Terrain can provide protection, in the form of positive Terrain Effects Modifiers (TEM), to both sides. Terrain can provide concealment, in the form of Hindrances, shielding both sides from fire. Solid defensive terrain with clear fields of fire is tough to overcome.

We must take terrain effects into consideration when planning our attack or defense. Failure to pick solid defensive terrain will inhibit your ability to withstand the attack. Failure to account for movement over the terrain will put you into conflict with the third maxim. Each side needs to be keenly aware of the “high-speed avenue of approach.” This is the fastest way to the VC area and an attacking victory. The DEFENDER must deny usage of this approach or make the toll to use that terrain exorbitantly high.

## Time

The tyranny of time. Within the scope of an ASL game, time is finite. Even if you’re playing a campaign game spread across 20 dates there is a finite amount of time for the ATTACKER to get where he needs to be to win. The clock is ticking. Time determines the tempo of an attack. I find one of the most difficult things for new players to figure out is the tempo of an attack. As a DEFENDER, if you can slow his attack early, you put pressure on him to act more rashly at the end to win.

For me, when I first sit down at a board, I look at the VC and setup restrictions. I look to see how many hexes I must move forward to reach victory. I divide this by the time available and I have a rough idea of how far I must go each turn. This allows me to know if I am “ahead of schedule” or “behind”.

Sadly, it isn’t this easy. Counting forward hexes doesn’t account for slow-go and no-go terrain. You include these factors when planning. As a DEFENDER you seek to deny the ATTACKER all the fast-go terrain you can. If your opponent is using fast-go terrain, you want it to be as far from the VC as you can make it. Hinge movement obstacles (Wire, AT Ditches, Mines, etc) to no-go terrain as much as you can so they can’t be easily bypassed. Use terrain and obstacles to funnel the ATTACKER in to kill-zones where you can bog them down and slow their forward progress.

One other thing to keep in mind is verticality. I am not speaking of verticality in the sense of hills but in the sense of Buildings. You can think of every floor you need to clear in a VC building as another turn. Using Upper-

Level Encirclement combined with Mopping Up should be your watch words but removing enemy units from upper levels is time consuming.

## Order of Battle

These are the tools you've been given to achieve your victory. In many ways, by the time you get here, a lot of your thinking should be done. You have already internalized the VC, already looked at the map, and already considered how these will affect the coming match. You have already looked at the timeline and "schedule" the attacker will need to maintain to achieve the VC. Your remaining job is to determine how to effectively use your assets to fulfill your side of the VC.

Some things you should consider at this point:

- Are any of your units required to fulfill the VC? Which units are needed to fulfill the VC?
  - Only Infantry can capture buildings.
  - Only Good Order units can exit for EVP.
  - Do you need a Set DC to destroy a bridge?
    - How are you going to protect that asset and how are you going to safely deliver it to the place you need it to be to win?
    - As the DEFENDER, how are you going to prevent this?
- Does either side have a CVP cap?
  - Your plan needs to account for this possibility.
  - As the ATTACKER, how do you protect your forces?
  - As the DEFENDER, how are you going to push the ATTACKER towards this cap?
- Does your OB have some advantage over your opponent's?
- How is your OB going to deal with your opponent's OB?
  - In some cases, it may not be obvious.
  - Perhaps your anti-tank asset will only be useful in Deliberate Immobilization.
  - It could be fanatic Infantry is your only AT asset.

## Conclusion

As I said in the intro, this isn't the only way to approach the game, but it is MY way. I will refer to this as we move forward. Make sure you take the time to understand this before going forward. If something is confusing you, come back and reread the section you need to understand. This is the foundation of everything that follows. Make sure your foundation is solid.

**Editor's Note:** My *ASL Tactical Maxims* article was chronologically the first article I wrote covering tactics in ASL. It is understandably short on implementation details but long on ideas. This isn't particularly helpful for new players, but I was writing this article for me. I was in a bit of a funk. I was losing games to people I thought I should be beating. I was trying to understand why I was failing. At the time, it struck me that I wasn't necessarily putting myself in a position to win. I wasn't considering all my options or creating a sound plan designed to win. I was just putting pieces on the board and winging it, hoping my talent alone would be enough to win it. This wasn't the case.

As I began to think about planning, I recalled my days in the US Army and the planning acronym I was introduced to there. I simplified it for my purposes and adapted as you see here. I immediately began to come up with better plans. I found I wasn't caught off guard as much. I understood what I needed to do to win and how my assets could be used to counter my opponent's assets.

With this understanding came a realization that my assets were often in place to oppose his. I was no longer struggling to just be competitive but, in a position to win. With the struggles fading, my enjoyment of the game increased. My frustration began to diminish. My personal morale battle hardened. I was able to be adaptable and flexible on both the attack and defense. As my frustration disappeared, I became more enjoyable to play ASL with. My surliness diminished; my attitude improved. I was happy to play ASL again and it showed.

The second chronological article is next in this collection. It covers Fortifications in ASL. While writing this article, I began to clue into the power of my Tactical Maxims. As I thought about when and where to place Fortifications, I found I was thinking in terms of VC, terrain, time, and enemy OB. I was thinking in terms of how Fortifications are used to enable a defender to win. It was at this point I knew I was on to something.

## Fortifications in ASL



"Fortification" is an ASL catch-all term used to describe various terrain changing features captured primarily on  $\frac{5}{8}$ " counters. I believe this characterization is too generic, hiding a subclass in plain sight. In my opinion, it is more accurate to say there are "Fortifications" and "Obstacles." In this article, I will seek to break down the difference between the two and provide general advice on how to use them both. I will also examine the rules and Q&A covering their use. I hope when you're through with this article, you'll have a much better understanding of how to use "Fortifications."

While Caves and Panjis are Fortifications, this article won't delve into those (see what I did there?). Caves are distantly like Pillboxes, although this is a gross simplification. Panjis are a lot like Wire. For now, let's focus on the others.

Before we get started, I want to make it clear this article primarily focuses on ETO play. I did this because I want to explain general principles. There are some specifics to PTO and DTO play, which I ignore in this article. This is a conscious decision on my part. Where I think it is appropriate, I will mention those specifics.

## Philosophy on Placing Fortifications

Before placing Fortifications, we need to think about how attackers unhinge defenses. In ASL, there are three ways:

1. Firepower—units shooting at other units
2. Maneuver—moving units to advantageous positions, increasing risk to friendly forces
3. Some combination of 1 and 2

Taken at face value, maneuver is far more effective, if for no other reason than the attacker has limited time to get some place. In almost EVERY case, the attacker will lose if they just sit there. Maneuver is the most important tool in the attacker's arsenal.

Proper placement of Fortifications and Obstacles in ASL is predicated upon fitting them into a coordinated defense. **Obstacles disrupt the enemy's ability to maneuver. Fortifications help protect your Infantry from the attacker's firepower, sustaining your own firepower.** The principles of coordinating these are beyond this article. I encourage you to read [My ASL Tactical Maxims](#) article to see my method. To see my method in action, I encourage you to look at any of my [scenario analysis](#) articles.

[Editor's Note: Notice the call back to my Tactical Maxims article. As you're reading through this, see if you can pick up on all the callbacks to that article or concepts contained in it.]

## Hidden Initial Placement

All Fortifications, as labeled by the rules, are set up using HIP. In Concealment Terrain, Fortifications remain hidden until a Good Order enemy ground unit  $\leq 16$  hexes away gains LOS, a unit in the Fortification uses the protective TEM, or a unit in the Fortification loses Concealment. Fortifications not in Concealment Terrain lose hidden status in the same manner, but the LOS range does not matter. In addition, hidden Fortifications do not



cost MPs/MFs to enter and exit while hidden.<sup>1</sup> There are limits, so review A12.33. This is an important point. Friendly units can fall back through hidden Wire Obstacles without needing to make an Exit dr to get “under” the Wire. This can create a nasty surprise for pursuing enemy units.

We begin with Fortifications.

## Placing Fortifications

The aim when placing Fortifications is to provide additional “staying power” to your Infantry. Trenches, Entrenchments, Pillboxes, and Fortified Building Locations all have one thing in common: they provide additional Terrain Effects Modifiers (TEM). Such TEM reduces the effectiveness of enemy fire and increases protection of your own Infantry. This isn’t all they do. We will cover some of the additional benefits later.

All this additional TEM is important. The attacker is being funneled into a killing field. As the attacker’s firepower concentrates, the danger to defending forces increases. Fortifications help keep your Infantry safe by degrading the quality of incoming attacks. With your Infantry better able to survive, your defense can continue to put firepower into the enemy, increasing your chances of winning. [Editor: Maxim 1]

## Entrenchments



Figure 1 1

Foxholes. Some love them, some are indifferent to them (including the author), some absolutely despise them. Some veteran players often refer to them as “death traps.” Newer players see them as the bulwark of their defense before watching their units get wiped out inside them. Foxholes’ reputation as “death traps” is partially well deserved, partially a misunderstanding of the correct use of Foxholes, and largely because of how entry and exit are modeled in ASL.

I won’t specifically cover Sangars, but they are close cousins of Foxholes. They each share the same strengths and weaknesses. Sadly, Sangars are not created during play and are only available as OB-given Fortifications.

<sup>1</sup> A12.33, B26.42, B26.43, B26.44, B27.55, B27.56, G9.4, G9.422, G9.46, & G9.53

**Q:** Per A12.33, “[a] unit entering/exiting a hidden Fortification pays no MF/MP to do so, provided that Fortification remains hidden including Infantry/Cavalry (only) crossing a roadblock hexside.” Infantry pays no extra cost for entering a Wire or Panji Location, but rather pays to move beneath the Wire/Panji [B26.44; G9.4]. Is this considered “entering” hidden Wire/Panji, and so costs 0 MF?

**A:** Infantry going beneath Wire is “Wire Exit” and thus costs no MF if the Wire is hidden. This is not the case for vehicles, however. Panjis are entirely different per the last sentence of G9.4.

**Q:** Do the non-MF related restrictions apply, e.g., can a CX/dashing unit cross HIP Wire [B26.46]?

**A:** Yes, e.g., no.



## In-Game Creation And Purpose



Figure 2

Foxholes remain one of two Fortifications/Obstacles that can be created during play. The complete details are in B27.11. Basically, to create a Foxhole, a unit makes an Entrenching DR during the Prep Fire Phase. If the DR is  $\leq 5$ —after all modifications for leadership, Labor status, unit size, and nationality distinctions—place a 1S Foxhole over the units taking part. The freshly dug Foxholes are the same as OB-given Foxholes in every way. They all share the same strengths and weaknesses.

The primary purpose of Entrenchments is to protect Infantry from OBA and enemy vehicles. We can see this on the counter itself. The TEM of a Foxhole is +4 versus OBA and Overruns (OVR). Against all other forms of fire, the TEM is only +2. But hidden inside this simple counter is a fatal design decision leading to their “death traps” description: getting out of them.

## Death Traps

Per B27.4, units entering and exiting a Foxhole during the MPH/APh but pay 1 MF to get into or out of a Foxhole. This is in addition to the MFs spent to enter the Location containing the Foxhole. If that Location is Open Ground, FFMO applies to movement spent BEFORE entering the Foxhole.

For the defender, this means occupied Foxholes in Open Ground with enemy Infantry around are “death traps.” Exiting the Foxhole in Open Ground is subject to at least a -1 DRM. Concealed units trying to Advance into them lose Concealment for first moving in Open Ground in the LOS of enemy units.

Even Foxholes placed in non-Open Ground create problems for skulking. Exiting the Foxhole costs 1 MF. Enemy units with an LOS can fire at these units as they attempt to leave. If these units are using Non-Assault Movement, they would lose Concealment. A unit in the same tree line, but not in a Foxhole, easily skulks away or withdraws without losing Concealment. When planning a Defense, one must keep this weakness in mind.

## Proper Usage

Given the strengths and weaknesses we have discussed, we can develop an idea of how to best use Foxholes. Do not place them in Open Ground. If another +2 TEM, or better, is available, use it instead. Do not put units in them and expect to use skulking to avoid fire attacks. If there is no other TEM available, Foxholes will work in a pinch. Use them in non-Open Ground Locations and Assault Movement can somewhat mitigate the risks of getting out of a Foxhole. As always, the weapons at the enemy’s disposal will also help to guide placement.

[**Editor's Note:** The common thread through this section concerning Foxholes is an examination of OB you're given as a player (Maxim 4). Too many players just put Foxholes down and put troops in them without a thought for placement and possible outcomes of doing so. This theme appears throughout this Fortifications article.]

### Proper Usage: Last Stand



Figure 3

The most obvious usage for Foxholes is to create a last-stand defensive position. Units in these positions expect to sell their lives dearly, tying up enemy units trying to eliminate them. I identified a good case for this in my scenario analysis of [Hazmo 5 The Blood Of Lambs](#).

In planning this defense, I decided the units inside **Festung One** would stand to the last man. I place OB given Foxholes in the area I envision a last stand to take place here. Besides OB-given Foxholes, I also plan on digging additional Foxholes in Locations **NOT** Adjacent to my OB-given ones. Digging the non-Adjacent Foxholes gives the Russian units better TEM and survivability. By being non-Adjacent, it denies the attackers the benefit of better TEM as they seek to reduce the position.

[**Editor's Note:** Remember, this article is chronologically before my *Defenses In ASL* article. You can see I am not using the terminology I will later describe when setting out to define my thinking. Here, I am clearly defining a **Hold at All Costs** method in combination with an **Alamo Defense Pattern**. Because I haven't put my thinking into words at this point, I am not being consistent with my later work. My thinking is evolving at this point. ]

### Proper Usage: Skulking

When used with a Wall or Hedge, a Foxhole can create a "skulk" position. Units in a Foxhole and behind a Wall/Hedge have no LOS across the Wall/Hedge hexside beyond Adjacent same or lower-level Locations. Units behind a Wall/Hedge can Assault Move into the Foxhole, get out of LOS, and then Assault Move out of the Foxhole to continue their defensive mission.

[ **Editor's Note:** Skulking is a derisive term used by ASL players who move out of the line of fire in their MPh and then advance back into front line positions in the APh. Some people detest it, but like it or not, it is a part of the

game and a vital part of a Defender's toolkit. In many ways, skulking has become synonymous with defending. If you aren't skulking, you're not playing properly.

I have spoken with many of the game's earliest players, and they suggest skulking was around from the beginning. The best players always skulked. As good play spread throughout the player-base, skulking became more and more prevalent. If you're playing a scenario, skulking was almost certainly used in play testing. If you're not skulking, you're increasing the effectiveness of the attack by exposing your troops to unnecessary fire attacks.]

### Proper Usage: Defending Against OBA/OVR

Given the +4 TEM against OBA and OVR, it should come as no surprise that Foxholes are great for defending against those attacks. But it isn't as good as it might seem. If a unit is in a Foxhole and OVR in Open Ground, the -1 DRM for FFMO (D7.15) would still apply. A unit in a Woods Location attacked with Indirect Fire suffers the -1 Air Bursts (B13.3) DRM. Each of these cases subtract from the effectiveness of Foxholes.

The negative effects of these two terrain types aren't particularly helpful. Setting up in Open Ground invites being OVR while setting up in a Woods Location invites Indirect Fire.

If the enemy OB doesn't include vehicles or Indirect Fire, these are not a concern.

### Proper Usage: Routing



Figure 4

Perhaps the absolute best usage of Foxholes is setting up rout paths through otherwise Open Ground. Per B27.41, a routing unit may combine the MF to enter/exit a Foxhole with other MFs spent to enter a new Location. This allows a unit to rout through Open Ground, albeit slowly. A Foxhole placed in a Dirt Road Location between two Building Locations can allow a broken unit to rout through the otherwise open Road Location without being subject to Interdiction.

Consider Figure 4. The broken German unit must rout. Since MF into and out of a Foxhole may be combined with entry costs for the next Location, the Broken German unit routs INTO the Foxhole for a combined 2 MF. It then routs into S5 for another combined 3 MF. These combined MFs allow it to avoid Interdiction and Surrender.

**[Editor's Note:** This section on routing speaks to the concept of force preservation. At this point, I haven't visited this topic chronologically, even though it is clearly part of my thinking. We will touch on this topic in more detail in the *Defense In ASL* article up next.]

## Trenches



Trenches only come into play when given by scenario OB. They share many of the same strengths and weaknesses of Foxholes. It costs a MF to enter and exit a Trench. They suffer the same -1 DRM for OVR and Air Bursts where applicable.

Figure 5

In addition, Trenches do not tie into Adjacent terrain except by SSR. If a unit wishes to move from a Trench into an Adjacent Woods or Building Location, the unit must spend 1 MF in the Trench's Location to exit the Trench. If this Location is Open Ground, the unit would be subject to a -1 FFMO DRM. Some HASL modules have SSRs "fixing" this and these SSRs have crept into many modern scenarios. Pay particular attention to the SSRs before counting on this benefit.

## Strengths

Trenches automatically connect to any Adjacent Trench counter not separated by a Cliff or Water Obstacle. Units can move from a Trench to an Adjacent, connecting Trench without paying entry costs for the terrain. Regardless of terrain, movement between connecting Trenches cost 1 MF unless moving to higher terrain. When moving to higher terrain, the cost is 2 MF regardless of terrain. FFMO/FFNAM never apply when moving along a Trench line and units using Non-Assault Movement do so without Concealment loss. Minefields in a Trench Location do not attack units moving IN the Trench. Walls, Hedges, and Wire are no Obstacle for units moving IN a Trench.

Once possessed by a side, friendly units may move from a lower Location directly into a Trench without paying the 1 MF entry cost (B27.6). Notice, to make this move, the moving side must control the Trench first or the Trench must be part of the side's OB.

**Also note, this movement to and from lower elevations also applies to Sangars.**

Only fully tracked vehicles may enter a Trench Location but must take a Bog Check on entry. All other vehicular entry is prohibited. A Trench can serve not only as a Fortification but may double as an Obstacle in a pinch. The odds of a fully tracked vehicle Boggling are slim but inhibiting all truck and halftrack movement could be a significant degradation to enemy maneuver options. Also notice, since Trenches do not connect to Adjacent Terrain. Vehicles can easily bypass these "hasty" obstacles, so plan accordingly.

Units rallying in a Trench receive the -1 terrain Bonus (A10.61). Interestingly, Trenches are not legal rout destinations (A10.51). When setting up Trenches, keep in mind how your units will rout. Bad planning can see your units compelled to rout and subjected to Interdiction.

### Proper Usage

There are few downsides to using Trenches, especially when connected in a system of interconnected Trench counters. Placed on top of a hill, units can safely skulk into lower terrain and advance back up without CX concerns, even into a Woods Location. The rally bonus makes them good rally points. Still, take care to include a legal rout destination some place close by.

**[Editor's Note:** There is a difference between "Rally Bonus" terrain and "Rout Destination" terrain. Rally Bonus terrain provides a -1 DRM to Rally attempts. Rout Destination terrain is terrain a unit must move towards when routing. Rout Destination Terrain also provides a Rally Bonus, so some players confuse Rally Bonus terrain with Rout Destination terrain. This is a mistake. Trenches are **NOT** Rout Destination Terrain.

When I mention the need to include a Rout destination here, this is what I am getting at. Being forced to leave a Trench line to rout is bad planning. If leaving the Trench subjects your units to Interdiction those units are forced to take a Morale Check. What's more, coming back into the line might exposed your units to incoming fire.]

A well-constructed Trench line can be very difficult to assault, particularly if on high ground. Remember, to move directly INTO the Trench from a lower-level Location, the Trench must be Controlled by that side (or be part of the side's OB). An enemy assaulting from a lower elevation must first move someone into the Open Ground from below to Control the Trench Location. This unit moving up won't receive the benefit of the TEM. Punish them accordingly.

A well situated and planned Trench line can be the bulwark you build your defense around. Make sure it has good fields of fire and supports the VC as **units in Trenches are static**. If an SSR allows you to tie Trenches into Adjacent terrain, make sure you account for that. Such an SSRs better allows for easy tactical relocation.

**[Editor's Note:** This is clearly a call back to Maxim 1. This is another theme that consistently appears in this series of articles.]



## Trenches: An Example

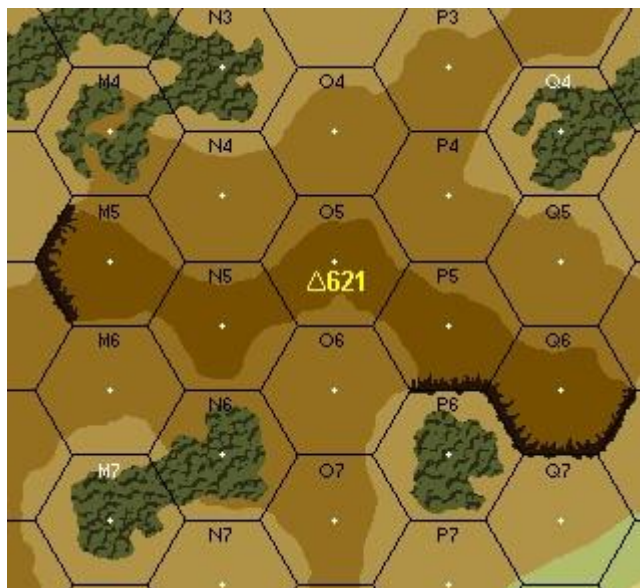


Figure 6

Refer to Figure 6. The Attacker is tasked with taking all the Level 3 Hill hexes pictured. The Defender is given 4 Trench counters as part of his OB. How can the Defender best place his Trenches to defend an attack coming from the top of the figure?

Right off, Trenches placed in P5/Q6 and P6 will not connect because of the Cliff hexsides. Recall, Trenches are not valid rout destinations. Units breaking in a Trench still require a valid rout destination when routing. Units which break in Q6/P5 must rout to P6. This could be problematic for units in Q6, as routing through P5 would likely get closer to Known enemy units.

The N6 hex is a much better rout destination. It is not only out of the likely LOS of approaching attackers; it is also downhill from a Trench line on the ridge. Broken units can exit directly into the lower elevation without having to pay the Trench exit cost. When moving back into the Trench, they move directly into it without paying the entry cost.

## My Solution

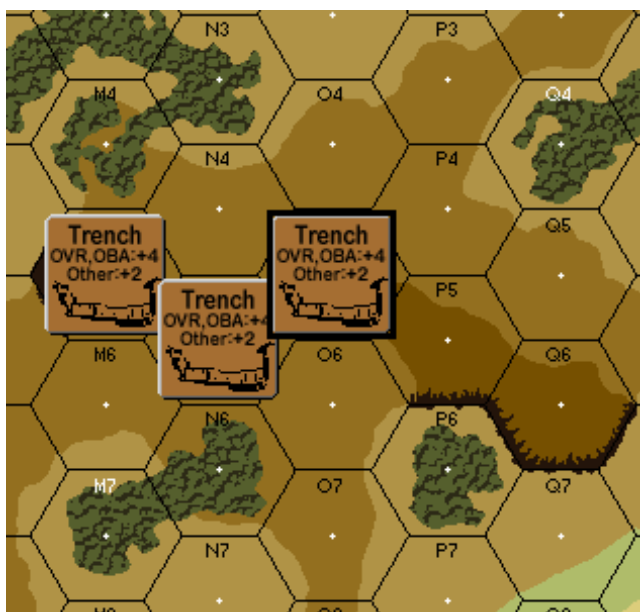


Figure 7

Given 4 Trench counters, M5, N5, and O5 are great positions for Trenches. Units in these Trenches have good TEM and good rout options. A leader in N6 can police up the broken units. N6 can also be a good place to store a local reinforcement to fill in gaps emerging in the lines. Units moving from N6 onto the hilltop enter directly into the Trench counter.

The last Trench counter is a bit of a dilemma. P5 is an interesting choice. P5 offers good fire opportunities to the flank and is likely the best option because of this. Broken units in P5 can still rout to N6 under most circumstances. M4 and N4 are also good options. The best, closest TEM for the attacking units is the Woods in M4. Putting a Trench in that

Location pushes the Attacker back away from the hilltop. N6 isn't a bad option but probably not the best. Personally, I would opt for P5.

Finally, in the Defender's turn, skulking out of the Trenches into M6, N6, and O6 should protect defending units from attack. If the Defender has a local reserve, he could constantly shuffle concealed units up onto the hilltop. As the Attacker closes in, Concealment can shield defending units from much bigger attacks.

## A-T Ditches



The rules covering Trenches also apply to A-T Ditches. The biggest change is no vehicle can enter the A-T Ditch Location, including fully tracked vehicles. Infantry enter and exit an A-T Ditch for 2 MF, but otherwise move along an A-T Ditch for 1 MF. This similarity to regular Trenches includes their lack of tying into Adjacent terrain. A vehicle can bypass an A-T Ditch. This surprises many newer ASL players.

Figure 8

## Proper Usage

You can use A-T Ditches in much the same way you would normal Trenches. While this doesn't seem to be the intent, the rules allow it. We have already discussed usage in this way. It is also interesting that Infantry/Cavalry can cross from "one side" of an A-T Ditch to the "other side" as if it weren't there. This includes activities such as pushing a Gun across the A-T Ditch. Wagons are vehicles and thus not able to enter an A-T Ditch Location.

Inside the base game, A-T Ditches contain the same weakness Trenches have. They do not connect to Adjacent terrain. In setting up a defense, remember to tie an A-T Ditch into the terrain/defense. Vehicles can (and will) bypass an A-T Ditch left "hanging" at the end of the line. Many veteran ASL players have taught this is a harsh lesson to new players.

Some third-party products have SSRs tying A-T Ditches into Adjacent terrain. If there is no such SSR, consider placing one A-T Ditch counter in the No-Go terrain itself. Absent that, make sure the Adjacent Location is not bypassable or covered with fire. A wreck along a hexside can block bypass movement too.

**[Editor's Note:** Again, a callback to Maxim 4.]



## A-T Ditch Example



Figure 9

Refer to Figure 9. The A-T Ditches placed in G3 and G4 do not “tie” into the terrain in G2 or G5. Thinking he recognizes a rookie mistake; the German player bypasses the Obstacle along the G2/G3 hexside. The American player is no rookie, however. He is covering his obstacle with fire power and reveals a hidden AT Gun in J4 which has LOS to the G2/H2/G3 vertex. Not only does the Gun have LOS, but the shot also attacks the weaker side aspect of the Panther. If the Panther is Immobilized/Wrecked along the G2/G3 hexside, no other vehicles can use VBM along this hexside.

## Pillboxes



Figure 10

A Pillbox can only be OB-given. They can set up in Open Ground, Woods/Jungle, Brush/Bamboo, or Grain/*Kunai* Location. Like all Fortifications, a Pillbox sets up using HIP and can remain hidden until an enemy unit gains LOS [EXC: See G.2 when playing PTO]. Unlike other Fortifications, the contents of a Pillbox also set up using HIP. When revealed, the contents of a Pillbox remain hidden. They are revealed per (B30.7). However, attacks against Concealed occupants of a Pillbox are not halved and Case K is NA.

A Pillbox creates a second Location in its hex. The MF spent to enter/exit a Pillbox cannot be combined with other MF. Once the unit spends a MF to enter/exit, all fire directed at the unit is in the new Location. Fire directed at a unit OUTSIDE the Pillbox cannot hurt units “IN” the Pillbox and vice versa. SMOKE cannot be placed IN a Pillbox, so the extra +1 for shooting from a SMOKE Location never applies to units in a Pillbox. Remember, all Fortifications can set up using HIP (A12.33), and if a Pillbox sets up hidden, so does its contents (B30.7).

## Pillboxes in PTO

I encourage you to read G1.632 when playing with Japanese Pillboxes. Reveal Pillboxes per G.2. Units setting up using HIP in a Pillbox are in addition to any the Japanese normally receive. A Japanese Pillbox also sets up with a Tunnel entrance which has many nefarious purposes (B8.6-.63). Japanese units in a Pillbox do not go Berserk, they Battle Harden instead (G1.62).

## Mechanics of Pillboxes

The first number of a Pillbox represents its stacking capacity, the second its Covered Arc Defense Modification, and the last its Non-Covered Arc Defense Modification. Pillboxes come in two flavors: brown and gray. The only difference between them is brown Pillboxes are more easily destroyed (B30.92).

A Pillbox is Rally terrain and broken units receive the -1 Terrain Bonus DRM (A10.61). Also, a Pillbox is a valid rout destination forcing units to rout towards them (B30.5) unless closer terrain exists, or the Pillbox is ignorable. A Pillbox cannot be over stacked. Even when occupied, a Pillbox remains a “rout magnet” for broken units. Placing a Trench in the same Location can mitigate the effects of units routing towards a Pillbox. Keep in mind a leader IN a Pillbox cannot Rally units OUTSIDE a Pillbox, because it is in a different Location. A broken unit inside a Pillbox is never forced to rout from it, even if the broken unit is ADJACENT to enemy units.

A unit cannot enter a Pillbox occupied by enemy units, even if those enemy units are broken. To gain Control of a Pillbox, a friendly unit must enter the Pillbox. To gain Control of a Pillbox hex, you must also gain Control of the Pillbox in that hex. Unless Ambush occurs or Infiltration is possible, gaining control of a Pillbox is often a two-turn endeavor.

Pillbox TEM is not cumulative with other TEM in the Location [EXC: *Mud/Deep Snow*]. Hindrances in the Location apply normally.

I also recommend you pay particular attention to B30.2 for LOS to and from a Pillbox and for limitations on shooting in its own hex from inside a Pillbox.

## Guns In Pillboxes

Guns set up in a Pillbox are still Emplaced. Gun target size is NA when shooting Ordnance at a Gun in a Pillbox (B30.32). Case K never applies when shooting at Pillbox contents. This INCLUDES the Concealment afforded by HIP (B30.21).

Guns in Pillboxes are vulnerable to HE Equivalency shots from AP (B30.35). I recommend you have a read of my [previous article](#) on the subject. It is much easier to eliminate a Gun and its manning crew through a Critical Hit than most players realize.

## Bunkers

A Pillbox with a Trench in an Adjacent, accessible hex is a Bunker. Remember, a hex is Adjacent with itself so the Trench can be in the same hex or an Adjacent hex. In such a circumstance, the Pillbox is still a Pillbox. For movement, however, a unit may move from the Adjacent Trench into the Pillbox, and vice versa, as if the Pillbox were a Trench. There are some limitations on this movement when an enemy unit is in the Pillbox's Location. Refer to B30.42, B30.44, and B30.6 for details.

## Proper Usage

The above was an awful lot to digest, and I didn't even cover every aspect of a Pillbox. Still, from this we can glean a Pillbox is powerful if part of a Trench system. Turning Pillboxes into Bunkers makes them even more effective, especially if you place a Trench in the Pillbox hex. Giving the Location a Trench gives units occupying the Pillbox a place to provide all around firepower rather than just within the Pillbox's CA. The Pillbox is still available to rout to if needed, although not being able to Over stack the Pillbox can cause routing issues.

Place Pillboxes in the heart of the defense if available. Their high TEM and Rally Bonus gives extra resiliency to units inside. Because they, and the units inside, are set up using HIP, they can be used to mask areas where you are particularly strong.

Align their CA to accomplish the mission you set for them as part of your cohesive defense. Sometimes this means covering a particular avenue of attack. Sometimes this means showing your invulnerable NCA to the expected approach. If it's part of the plan and you have accounted for how you plan to use it, it can be integrated into a strong defense.

## Fortified Location

Fortified Buildings are only available as part of the at start OB. Fortifying a Building Location adds +1 to the Building's Inherent TEM. Unless Breached (B23.9221), enemy units cannot enter a Fortified Location occupied by an unpinned, Good Order, armed squad (or its equivalent). Even upper levels of a building can be Fortified, but only if all lower levels in the same hex are Fortified as well. A Gun of any target size and type can be set up in a Ground Level Fortified Building Location. An ART/AT/INF Gun  $\leq 76\text{mm}$  may be set up in an upper-level Fortified Building Location.

Fortified Locations may be exchange for a Tunnel per B8.6. This Tunnel exchange is not reference in B23.9x. The placement of Tunnels and usage are covered in B8.6. Tunnels allow units to safely through and pop out

Concealed in the APH. Clever usage can allow units to emerge into Rally Locations or key enemy stacks for Close Combat opportunities. Tunnels can also be used to allow safe routing opportunities. Otherwise, Fortified Locations are just like any other building Location.

## Proper Use

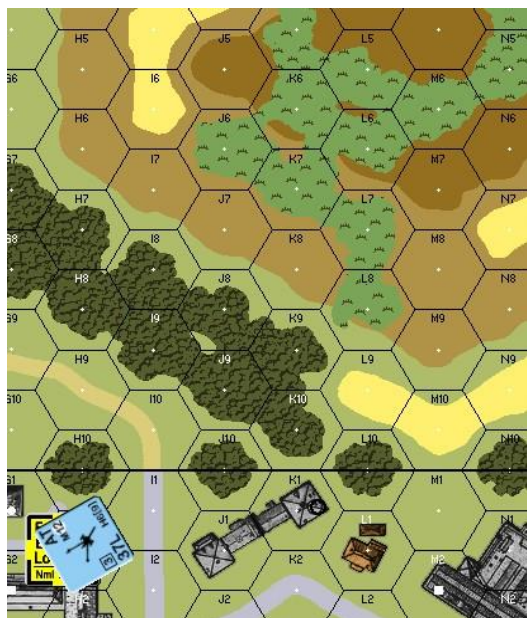


Figure 11

Fortified Locations make great options for stand-or-die defensive holds. Because an unpinned, armed Good Order unit can block entry, getting into a Fortified Building is difficult.

If given multiple Fortified Building Locations, adding an AT Gun to an upper-level Fortified Building Location can come as a surprise, particularly if unexpected lines of sight become available. From an upper level, a Gun can see over walls, hedges, and rubble it wouldn't otherwise be able to. Consider Figure 10. This is from Hazmo 3, Seaside Retreat. In this scenario, the attacker has six halftracks and must use them to move across the width of the board. Coming across the board 78 Hill is a significant threat. Here, the German player has invested all three Fortified Building Locations (Ground, Level 1, and Level 2) to place an AT Gun covering the hilltop. This could be a nasty

surprise for those pesky French halftracks.

## Obstacle Placement

Now we will move on to Obstacles. The aim of Obstacle placement is to restrict enemy movement and force enemy units into kill zones away from vulnerable flanks. Tie Obstacles to the terrain for greatest effect. A Roadblock that can be moved past using Vehicle Bypass Movement (VBM) is no Obstacle. Instead, combine this Roadblock with a non-bypassable Location or some other No-Go terrain to hamper the enemy's ability to move across the battlefield.

It's just as important to tie Obstacles to the overall concept of the defense. Cover Obstacles with firepower or they might be easily removed. Firepower must cover the pathways the enemy is channeled to and exact a heavy toll from attacking units crossing the area.

**[Editor's Note:** While it is not stated here directly, it is clear to me at least that I am speaking of Victory Conditions. I am also speaking about a couple of tactical considerations we will explore in the next article; enemy disruption/elimination and area denial.]

## Prepared Fire Zones



Figure 12

Prepared Fire Zones (PFZ) are not listed as a Fortification in ASL. They do not get the benefit of setting up using HIP. Still, they create LOS where none existed before and help to create kill zones. They don't create TEM. The new LOS cuts both ways. Improper placement can expose your own units to fire. I think of them as Obstacles and not Fortifications.

PFZ are used to create an LOS where none exists. This is an attempt to model clearing the terrain to create fields of fire. A side's OB may give several "factors" with which to place a PFZ. Placement of a PFZ converts the board's terrain to the type listed on the counter.

Convert a brush, vineyard, orchard, cactus patch, olive grove, gain, palm tree, or *kunai* hex to Open Ground for one PFZ factor. Convert a woods, forest, pine woods, jungle, or bamboo hex to a Vineyard hex at a cost of one PFZ factor. Note, per B36.22 a created Vineyard PFZ can itself be converted to an Open Ground PFZ.

## Proper Use



Figure 13

Set up PFZ to allow fire from critical defensive hard points into enemy movement corridors. By doing this, you create LOS to attack enemy maneuver. Given the narrow "corridor" like nature of the PFZ, the most likely target will be Infantry. Shooting at fleeting vehicular targets with limited aim penalties makes hitting vehicles unlikely. Offset limited LOS issues with bore sighting or get creative with placement.





Figure 14

To block LOS, the LOS obstacle must appear on both sides of a thread drawn between the source and the target. A LOS along a hexside of a PFZ hex is not blocked. LOS exists between the American and German squads.

Keep in mind vineyards are “soft” Hindrances. Such Hindrances negate the FFMO penalties for Fire Lanes. FFNAM will still apply. Optimally, place PFZs to the “oblique” open Fire Lane opportunities hindering the forward progression of enemy Infantry. PFZs opened to the oblique shield defending units from direct fire from the attackers’ jump-off positions. Notice in Figure 13 how the American unit has two separate Fire Lane options while not being directly exposed to fire from the enemy coming from the left edge of the image. The vineyard represents a “soft” Hindrance. While that Hindrance cancels FFMO, enemy units are still subject to a -1 FFNAM DRM when using Non-Assault Movement.

**[Editor’s Note:** More talk of disruption and elimination of enemy forces. This also includes an assessment of how useful the Obstacle is (Maxim 4).]

## Wire

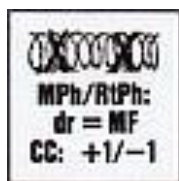


Figure 15

Wire is a Fortification which hinders Infantry’s movement. Infantry moving through a Wire Obstacle must first pay terrain entry cost to enter a Wire Location. Once in the Location, Infantry are placed “on top” of the Wire counter and must then make an Exit dr to determine how many MF they spend to get “below” the Wire.<sup>2</sup> A unit cannot leave the Wire Location until they are “below” the Wire. Units stuck on Wire are vulnerable to CC, suffering a -1 DRM to CC attacks against it. All attacks by units on Wire receive a +1 DRM.

A unit may not use Double Time in the turn in which they attempt to move beneath the Wire. A broken unit which routs onto Wire must make an Exit dr to get “below” the Wire. If they cannot make it “below” and remain

<sup>2</sup> **B26.4** Is a stack that has declared movement with a leader a “Unit” when moving under wire, so that only one dr is required for the stack?

**A.** No; each individual unit has to make its own Wire exit dr.

ADJACENT to an armed, unbroken, Known enemy unit, eliminate the broken unit for failure to rout. Eliminate units that break in an Open Ground Wire hex and cannot rout away because of the Exit dr.

Infantry cannot bypass a Wire hexside. Wire “sort of” ties into ADJACENT terrain. A vehicle may bypass such a hexside but must pay the extra MP costs and take all the requisite Bog Checks along the way.

Trucks, armored cars, and halftracks may enter a Wire Location at a cost of 4 MP plus the cost of terrain. Besides all the other Bog Check modifiers, Wire adds a +2 DRM. Even fully tracked vehicles must pay the movement costs and Bog Check, but a 1 on the colored die of a Bog Check DR removes the Wire counter from play if the Bog Check is made in the Wire hex.

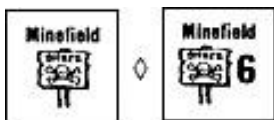
### Proper Usage

Frederick the Great said, “He who defends everything defends nothing.” Your defense can’t be everywhere. Thinly spread like this, it will be easily overrun and defeated. The best use of Wire is to slow an enemy’s approach to a key defensive position or to slow movement along a corridor. It bears repeating to drive the point home; Wire attacks an enemy’s ability to maneuver. The intent is to compel the attacker into kill zones covered by the bulk of your forces.

To make Wire as effective as possible, cover it with fire power. It’s not enough to cover the passages between the Wire. Optimally, shoot enemy units as they attempt to get under the Wire. Shooting at them as they get “on” the Wire leaves Residual FP in the Location, which will attack the first unit—and every unit thereafter—as they roll to get beneath the Wire.

Remember, as long as Wire remains hidden, there is no need to roll to get beneath the Wire. As a Defender, this should be a consideration of when and where to fall back.

### Minefields



In some ways, Minefields are much like Wire. They attack the enemy’s ability to maneuver, but they do so with firepower. There are two kinds of Minefields: A-T, or Anti-Tank, and A-P, or Anti-Personnel.

Figure 16

Units which enter or exit an A-P Minefield are attacked on the IFT column of their listed factors. They attack surviving units again on exit. A KIA result on an armored vehicle Immobilizes that vehicle. Unarmored vehicles are attacked on the ★ Vehicle of the IFT column and resolved normally. Of special note, AFVs with an unarmored side or rear, and AFVs whose lowest hull armor factor is zero are considered unarmored for an A-P Minefield attack. This especially concerns U.S. halftracks.



Only Wagons or vehicles entering and exiting their Location trigger A-T Mines. Infantry/Cavalry do not trigger an attack. Also note, Motorcycles do not trigger an A-T Minefield attack either. When a qualifying unit enters an A-T Minefield, roll one die. If the dr is  $\leq$  the factors on the counter, the vehicle has struck a mine.

A-T Mines attack on the 36 column of the IFT. Immediately eliminate as a Burning Wreck, unarmored vehicles (including those with an unarmored aspect or whose lowest hull armor factor is zero). Eliminate armored vehicles as a Burning Wreck on a Final DR  $\leq$  3 (4KIA). On a Final DR  $\leq$  6 (1KIA), eliminate the armored vehicle. Otherwise, Immobilize the AFV where it is.

### Daisy Chain

These represent A-T Minefields portaged and placed by the MMC using them. They are an A-T Minefield. They can be deployed into an AFV's Location even as the AFV enters it. If an SSR grants you a Daisy Chain, take a moment to read B28.531 before the game to make sure you know how it's used.

### Odds Of An A-T Minefield Attack

Outlined below are the chances of an AFV being successfully attacked by an A-T Minefield. Keep in mind, the attacker does not know the Minefield factors until the Minefield attacks a unit. You can use this uncertainty to your advantage.

A-T Minefield Factors	Odds of Attack on Entry	Combined Entry/Exit Odds
1	16.67%	29.44%
2	33.33%	55.22%
3	50%	75%
4	67%	88.89%
5	83.33%	97.21%

### Minefield Exchange

A-P Mines may be exchanged for A-T Mines at a rate of 3 A-P factors for every 1 A-T factor. The reverse is not true. It's worth considering exchange for A-T Mine factors if you have limited AT assets.

## Hidden Movement

Unlike other hidden Fortifications, hidden Minefields will affect friendly units even while still hidden. Eliminate Dummy stacks moving in to/out of a Hidden Minefield.

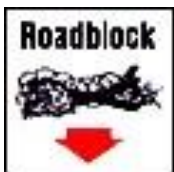
## Proper Usage

Use Minefields to deny terrain to an enemy. Minefields can effectively cancel projected rally points on an expected avenue of attack. Minefields placed in Building Locations attack enemy units as they enter and exit the Location through a non-Building hexside.

Like Wire, Minefields are most effective when used to channel the enemy into kill zones. This channeling effect extends to unarmored vehicles as well. Like Wire, they are most effective when covered with fire from defending units, but don't have to be. Beware of uncovered Minefields when the enemy has fully tracked vehicles. These place a Trail break through a Minefield, allowing safe passage for Infantry. In addition, Infantry can attempt to clear a path through both A-P and A-T Minefields. Covering fire removes this luxury.

**[Editor's Note:** Area denial is a primary role of minefields. They stop the enemy from using terrain and can be a strong funneling force for enemy movement. By now, it should be clear that much of this assessment is part of the Maxim 4 OB assessment.]

## Roadblock



Like many other Fortifications, Roadblocks are OB-given. Roadblocks must be set up in a Road or Runway Location with its arrow pointing at the hexside blocked. Notably, a Roadblock extends from hex center dot to hex center dot (see Figure 17). Treat a Roadblock like a stone wall. No vehicle may cross a Roadblock hexside.

Figure 17

Unlike other hidden Fortifications, even when hidden, a Roadblock affects friendly movement. Infantry and Calvary may cross it as if crossing a stone wall. Friendly vehicles are prohibited from crossing just as if it were on board.

## Proper Usage



Figure 18

Like other Fortifications, Roadblocks must be covered by fire. They are most useful when tied into the surrounding terrain. Referring to Figure 17, notice how it ties into the terrain. The S10 hexside is not bypassable on the bottom of the image. Placing them covering the entrance or exit to a Bridge can completely stop vehicular traffic across the bridge. A Foxhole placed behind such a Roadblock allows Infantry to hold the Roadblock. Such Infantry can skulk into the Foxhole and leave LOS.

Roadblocks impede vehicular maneuver, friendly and non-friendly. Take care not to affect your own maneuver. Since they are “stone walls,” they are a ½ level Obstacle. Leverage this to block LOS at the same level. They also count as Hull Down Locations to vehicles parked behind them. This can cut both ways, so plan accordingly.

## Rubble/Debris



These are not technically Fortifications. Occasionally, though, an SSR will give some number of Rubble counters to be placed. The principles discussed concerning Obstacles are still worth considering.

Rubble counters placed in Stairwell Locations can deny upper-level Building hexes to advancing attackers. Knocking down Buildings and other LOS Obstacles can open LOS to defending units in upper-level Locations and offer additional tactical flexibility. At the ground level, it can block LOS, giving units a chance to move. As the Defender, use this to your advantage.

Units cannot Bypass Rubble hexes. Defenders can use this restriction to their advantage. There’s a reason Rubble and Debris placement is before each side sets up. As the Defender, make sure you tie your Obstacles and Fortifications into the terrain for maximum effect.

Rubble is no longer a building, and thus not a rout destination, nor does it receive the Rally Terrain Bonus (A10.61). This can deny the enemy rally terrain necessary to reconstitute his force.

**[Editor’s Note:** Here we see a Maxim 2 observation—Terrain analysis—creep into an assessment on Obstacles. Some may not think this appropriate, but to me, it makes perfect sense. All obstacles and firepower must be

tailored to the terrain. The fact a Rubble hex cannot be bypassed makes an Obstacles like and A-T Ditch that much stronger. Now you don't need to place an A-T Ditch into the terrain to stop bypass, potentially freeing up an A-T Ditch for use elsewhere.]

## Complex Obstacles

Complex obstacles are more a plan than a thing. With a complex obstacle, you're trying to influence the enemy's movement such that he stumbles from one Obstacle to the next. Imagine an enemy moving along a flank pursuing a unit falling back before them. The unit disappears into the Woods. Following up, they come into LOS of some Wire which they now must roll to get beneath. The running unit has stopped just behind the Wire to protect it with firepower.

Not liking his chances, the attacker opts for a different path through a Gully where he stumbles into a Minefield. A hidden unit also pops up and First Fires at the unit on entry. Does the attacker stop there? Does the attacker continue forward? If the attacker continues, a unit which breaks exiting a Minefield remains in the Minefield. Since the RFP hasn't attacked the units yet, the RFP attacks units returned to the Minefield.

Not liking his chances down that avenue, the attacker chooses another line of approach, only to discover a hidden Bunker with an HMG laying down a Fire Lane and closing out this avenue of approach.

A Roadblock closes off another avenue. The attacker sends Infantry forward to clear the Roadblock, only to find A-P Mines in the Roadblock Location.

Complex obstacles give the attacker tough decisions. The more tough decisions the attacker faces, the more likely he is to make a bad one. As the attacker blunders into one Obstacle after another, he wonders if the defender just has his number. The attacker comes under pressure as the clock runs out. As desperation sets in, favorable defensive opportunities will inevitably present themselves.

## Conclusion

This has been a rather long article. As I was writing about it, I thought about various types of defenses. Each of these defense archetypes place different emphasis on the usages of Fortifications and Obstacles. It occurred to me there is likely room for a broader explanation of these defenses. This is why I focused on mechanics and purpose. Still, I think an accompanying article on types of defenses will work nicely with this one. Look for that soon.

**Editor's Note:** In this conclusion you can finally see me beginning to grasp the larger implications of my ASL Maxims. It is with this article that I finally begin to see the broader application. While it may not be clear to the reader, it is clear to me that subconscious processes are finally intruding into my conscious thought.

Before the Fortifications article was published, I began the next article: *Defense In ASL*. At this point, I was excited. The power of my ASL Maxims article was beginning to sink in as I could see common themes between it and this article on Fortifications.

Given the defensive nature of obstacles and fortifications in ASL, I next set out to write an article on defending. It seemed the next logical progression. By this time I had also written a couple of scenario analysis articles using my Maxims. I noticed a trend in my articles where I was applying patterns. Given my background in software development, this made sense. Programmers use patterns all the time. Maybe other readers won't see it them as such, but it worked for me.

I then began reading doctrinal literature to see if I could find something which at least hinted my thinking was close to actual doctrinal thinking. It was clear modern thought was there while period thinking was not (at least in English, the German army was far beyond the Allied powers thanks in part to the lessons they learned in the Spanish Civil War). It makes some sense that period doctrine was not there. Combined arms attacks were something new. They were a work in progress.

It makes even more sense if you consider the maelstrom of battle many of our cardboard warriors sailed in. If you as an ASL player survived your first battle, you gained experience to carry forward. Many of our men represented by our cardboard pieces didn't. That learning didn't survive with them. Even the ones who survived had to move up the ladder and promulgate their learning. It was a slow evolution to more modern tactics. But none of that stops us from thinking about more modern thinking in our playing of this WWII centric game.

Still, the modern literature was battalion based where most of our scenarios are company and below. Even with this difference, it was possible to adapt what I was reading into what I was thinking. Putting pen to paper, this next article covers what I came up with.

## Defenses in ASL



While working on the article covering [Fortifications and Obstacles in ASL](#), I gave some thought to types of defenses in ASL. Sitting and thinking about it, I came up with five types of defenses: area, point, defense in depth, mobile defense, and disruptive. Some of these seemed a little arbitrary to me, so I delved into doctrine.

I looked at period Field Manuals and contemporary literature trying to find something that resonated with my experiences in ASL. I found contemporary literature was the best corollary to ASL as I know it, but that literature covered battalion employments. Much of ASL is generally at the company and platoon level.

Still, my thinking was basically in line with the literature. This reassured I was on a good path. What follows is my thinking defense at a macro-level.

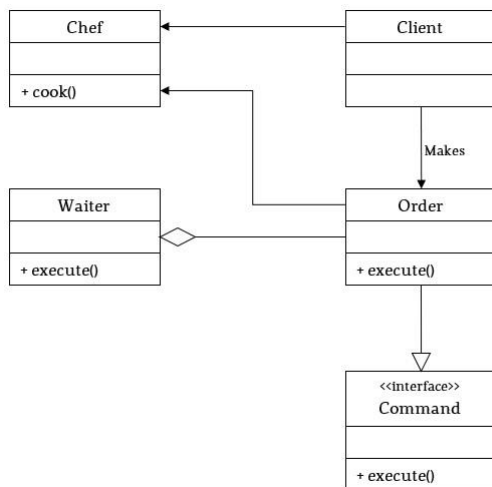
### Defending is Programming?

I know a lot of ASL players come from a computer science background. Even amongst those who do not, there are a lot of players who can program. Among this crowd, the concept of “design patterns” should resonate. This is how I believe we should properly think about defense.

For those who don’t know, a design pattern is a general, repeatable solution to common programming problems. It isn’t the code necessary to solve the problem, but it is a way of easily resolving the problem by tailoring it to the requirement. With a toolbox of patterns, a programmer decomposes the problem into smaller tasks solved by specific patterns. Solving all the tasks also solves the problem itself.

Occasionally, a general pattern doesn’t fit a task. It is there the programmer must focus the bulk of their effort. But once completed, we add the pattern to the library, and it is reusable later.

## Defending Patterns



When setting up a defense, I start by examining the VC to understand the least I can do to win. This becomes my aim or the problem I am trying to solve. Knowing my aim, I examine the terrain to look for defensive tasks I can stitch together to meet these minimum requirements. In programming terms, I decompose the hard problem (the VC) into discrete tasks. Solving these tasks gives me a chance to resolve the problem and, therefore, win.

As we look at the defending patterns, keep in mind these are very general. They are not a script. It is incumbent upon the player to decompose the defense into a series of tasks and then identify a pattern to apply to the task. Identifying a pattern and applying the principles is not a matter of simple regurgitation. Effective application involves adapting the pattern to the local circumstance. The ideal solution will almost always be a combination of patterns. Do not forget that any pattern must be adaptable to consider the vagaries of extreme luck. You can control most aspects, but the dice will always betray you at the crucial moment. Never hinge your plan on a necessary series of rolls.

**[Editor’s Note:** Here you can clearly see the impact of my Maxims on my thinking. Right up front, I touch upon Maxim 1: VC. I plainly state that everything relates back to that. It drives my decision making.]

### A Word Of Caution

Remember, before you proceed, you should have already examined the VC and terrain. You should have a general idea of a plan and know how you expect to win. These are prerequisites to what follows. A plan doesn’t magically appear by slapping a few patterns on the map. Patterns are part of the plan and must be integrated into a cohesive defensive posture designed to do the least amount necessary to win. I covered my thought process on this in my [ASL Maxims](#) article. I cannot emphasize this enough. Failing to plan is ensuring failure.

### Strong Points

When I refer to Strong Points, I am referring to some cluster of terrain around which a defending “platoon” will be based. The Strong Point should enable the “platoon” placed here to fulfill the task—the defending pattern—assigned. This isn’t an Alamo, although it could be. The ideal Strong Point has positive TEM and a covered Location to rout to and rally in. Ideally, covered paths for ingress and egress from your side of the map exist with wide open fields of fire on the attacker’s side of the map. In a perfect world, Strong Points mutually



support each other with interlocking fields of fire. Strong Points should also contain a rally position. The longer you plan to hold the Strong Point, the more instrumental the rally point is.

As I thought more about Strong Points, I realized a “point defense” as alluded to in the first paragraph is just a Strong Point. It isn’t a defense unto itself, it is a piece that plays a part in a defense. I am using a Strong Point (or series of Strong Points) with some other design pattern mission applied, likely an Alamo or Choke Point pattern. As such, I removed “Point Defense” pattern from consideration.

### Criteria For Strong Point Consideration

- What is the Strong Points mission?
  - What pattern will we use?
- How long does the Strong Point need to be held?
  - This is part of the pre-game analysis.
- What type of units/weapons will be in the Strong Point?
- This will be determined by the OB.
- Are units in the Strong Point expected to fall back?
  - Do they have a secondary mission? 2. Do they need a secondary Strong Point?
- What is the trigger to fallback?

**[Editor’s Note:** Each of these criteria have some basis in my Maxims. Mission ties into Maxim 1. Identifying units and roles ties into Maxim 4. Falling back is reference to Maxim 2. The last bullet doesn’t directly say “time”, but it is a clear reference to Maxim 3. It should be clear by now that all this thinking is intertwined. The Maxims are the foundation of a framework that can be applied to ASL thinking for forming a plan for success.]

### Tactical Considerations

When setting out to defend, there are a couple of tradeoffs to weigh. These are not mutually exclusive but understanding your intent can help to focus your decision making. Remember, we are seeking to do the least possible amount of work necessary to ensure victory. In no order:

### Enemy Disruption vs. Enemy Destruction

We all know what destruction is. Disruption doesn’t mean Disruption in an ASL sense, it means the units can’t fulfill the attacker’s mission. An AFV blocked from achieving its mission by an A-T Ditch is disrupted in this sense. Broken Infantry is “disrupted” from completing its mission objectives. Sometimes destroying the enemy isn’t the aim. Knowing your intent can help set triggers to fall back or counterattack as needed.



## Area Denial vs. Terrain Retention

Preventing the attacker from using some key terrain, for instance, a hilltop or road, is important to the conduct of the defense. Of course, you could occupy this terrain and deny it that way, but maybe there is a better option. Maybe Mines can make the terrain less usable. Perhaps an OBA AR drifting in the area is enough. Maybe a Gun overlooking the area can do the job.

## Force Preservation vs. Hold At All Costs

Sometimes, having troops left at the end is part of the VC condition. In those cases, we need to emphasize force preservation. Sometimes, simply denying the attacker the VC is all that matters. In those cases, remember, it's only cardboard.

## Disrupting Combined Arms Forces

Infantry (and Guns), armor, OBA, and air support combine to make the whole greater than the sum of its parts. One of the defender's objectives must consider how to break this synergy up. Stopping one or more of these aspects places a greater burden on the other arms. For instance, separating Infantry from supporting AFVs makes both more vulnerable. This subject is an easy thing to mention, but a hard thing to describe in action. As you learn, you'll develop a sense for how this works. I am sorry I can't give you a better insight than that.

As you are planning your defense, keep these tactical considerations at the forefront of your thinking. Now, let's look at the patterns as I see them.

**[Editor's Note:** What I call "Tactical Considerations" here embodies a piece of Maxim 1: it's not enough to know the VC, you also need to know HOW to fulfill the VC. Reducing attacking Infantry when the VC require Building Control will help to define what your tactical considerations are.]

## Defensive Patterns

These are my patterns. I am sure many will recognize them from their own play. There is nothing revolutionary (or even evolutionary) here. Some will suggest additional patterns. As with any topic, opinions will vary. I don't believe this list is complete. There is plenty of room for more. These are just the ones I recognize at the time of writing this.



## Area Defense Pattern

This pattern denies the enemy usage of a tract of space on the map. This can be open ground the enemy needs to cross or terrain that needs taken. You can deny this space via firepower or obstacles. Mines placed in a key Rally terrain Location are just as effective as firepower for making this Location undesirable. The Defender's aim is to make this terrain as costly as possible to take or cross. The attacker must pay the price in time and material.

## Alamo Defense Pattern

This pattern holds a hex or a small cluster of hexes. Usually this will be a "hold at all costs" effort. Presumably, this represents the least the defender can do to win. Often, the Strong Point is the Alamo. It is essential the Defender knows how VCs are achieved or denied. Imagine a building Control scenario. It is the last turn, and the Attacker is Adjacent and capable of entering CC. Voluntarily breaking and routing to an upstairs location may be enough to win.

## Defense in Depth Pattern

This is a multi-layered pattern of mutually supported Strong Points. This defense seeks to invite the attacker into the spaces between Strong Points and then destroy the attacker from all sides. This might backfire as the attacker can seek to cut off and reduce Strong Points one at a time. A key element of this defense is to DELAY the attacker at every opportunity. This pattern is likely composed of many other patterns. This pattern synergizes very well with the Area Defense Pattern.

## Linear Defense Pattern

This pattern is the opposite of a defense in depth pattern. The Strong Points in this pattern are in a line perpendicular to the enemy attack. This pattern is best suited to oppose Infantry assaults. A mobile enemy that penetrates the line will be nearly impossible to deal with. We can predicate the Linear Defense on a board edge, a ridgeline, a road, a gully/stream, or any other linear terrain feature. The ideal implementation offers good TEM for defending units while subjecting enemy units IFT DR with negative modifiers. A proper Linear Defense will also have some local reinforcements to plug holes in the line. This pattern synergizes very well with a Fighting Withdrawal pattern.

## Fighting Withdrawal Pattern

Characterized by a series of tasks designed to delay and wither away the attacking force. Usually, the Defender is trading space (ground) for time. Sometimes, the Defender must also fulfill an exit requirement. The initial tasks (and associated Strong Points) are likely on the front line and part of a Linear

Defense or Defense in Depth pattern. Subsequent tasks (and associated Strong Points) are behind the front line. The defender plans to fall back in his turn to reform the line. Each new line is likely to follow a Reverse Slope pattern. The key to this pattern is recognizing when it's time to fall back to the next line.

Rout paths, skulking positions, and Rally Locations are keys to success.

### **Mobile Defense Pattern**

Units moving to the point of attack rather than being set up to receive the attack characterize this pattern. This has the benefit of defending the point of attack but carries the risk of being interdicted traveling to the point of attack. These moving units can be a local reserve carved out of the Defender's OB, or reinforcements brought onto the board after the game begins. Usually, units taking part in a "Mobile Defense Pattern" will move to Strong Point and enact one of the other Defensive Patterns.

### **Disruptive Defense Pattern**

Random placement of units which intend to disrupt the attacker's continuity and timeline characterizes this pattern. This pattern forces the attacker to spend time and resources to reduce the problem. HIP Obstacles or units popping up to take unaccounted for shots are great examples of this pattern. We can also use careful employment of a mixed force of Concealed units and Dummy Stacks for this pattern. Doing so will help sew confusion and doubt in your opponent's thinking.

### **Reverse Slope Pattern**

Hiding behind some terrain to avoid incoming fire. This pattern takes its name from setting up a defense on a hillside opposite the attacker's advance. This pattern also ensures the defender takes the first shot. The goal is to break or eliminate the attacker every time he advances into LOS. Ideally, the defender has better TEM/protection than the attacker on the hilltop. It is best if the defender has something at the level of the hilltop to strip concealment from units advancing up into open ground. This pattern synergizes very well with the Linear Defense Pattern.

### **Perimeter Defense Pattern**

We characterize this pattern by an all-around defense. Typically, squeezing the bulk of the defender's OB into a small space arrayed to defend in all directions. We often use this pattern when Strong Points are far enough apart that units in them cannot effectively support each other. Units committed to this pattern are highly likely to be eliminated. If survival is key, either do not commit units to this pattern or withdraw them to a secondary task quickly.

## Choke Point Pattern

This pattern is best used when the enemy has few options for fast movement into the defense. The goal is to identify narrow passages and then deny the attacker's usage of these passages. This is often best accomplished when terrain is available on either side of the passage, allowing the defender to crossfire on units attempting to force their way through. The "width" of the passage should be no wider than the effective engagement range of the units attempting to hold the passage. Set Strong Points on either side of the passage and hold as long as necessary.

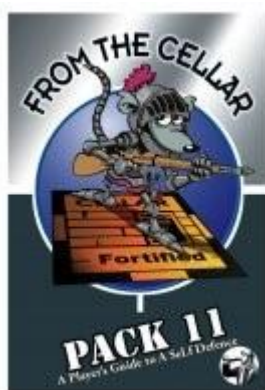
## Ambush Pattern

This pattern is characterized by having more units covering the ground than the attacker perceives. Careful usage of Dummy stacks and hidden units are a key aspect of this pattern. Long-range fire from elevated units can sometimes contribute in unexpected ways. The canonical example is a hidden Gun or half squad with a bazooka popping up to kill an enemy vehicle. But there are plenty of other options. For instance, a Pillbox and all its contents set up hidden. We do not place the Pillbox and its contents on board until an enemy unit gains LOS (LOS at  $\leq 16$  hexes if in Concealment terrain). This can lead to some nasty surprises.

## Spoiling Attack Pattern

This is recognizing a local opportunity. As part of conducting the defense, an opportunity arises to counterattack. This may be an opportunity to surround broken units and eliminate them for failure to rout. Maybe the attacker allows units to push out into space, creating more breathing room for the defense. Much like disrupting combined arms attacks, recognition and exercise of this option will develop over time. It is hard to recognize opportunities and MUCH harder to plan for.

## Patterns And Toby Pilling's "Manual"



For a moment, Let's consider Toby Pilling's excellent article, *A Players Guide to A Self Defence* from [Le Franc Tireur #11](#). In his article, Toby says "I split the OB into platoon sized forces" and these platoons "give(s) me the number of defensive positions". Toby speaks about how he divides up unassigned Infantry, leaders, and support weapons based on the tasks he has assigned each platoon.

What I do is something quite similar. First, I examine the VC to determine the least I can do to win. I examine the terrain to decide the best chance to achieve this "least effort solution." Next, I try to determine the enemy's path to the VC I intend to deny, looking for defensible areas to achieve my victory. I identify Strong Points along this path and determine if there is a defensive pattern suitable to the terrain and forces I have on hand. Finally, I assign the forces I have to the

task, adapted to the terrain and VC. I find it VERY interesting that Toby and I have independently arrived at a similar approach.

**[Editor's Note:** Right up front, I refer to my Tactical Maxims in this example and how they drive my thinking and decision making. The value of these is beginning to sink in with me. If you take the time to read any of my scenario analysis articles, you'll see my Tactical Maxims clearly called out. In my early articles, you won't see me calling out to any of the defensive patterns. I hadn't pulled them out of my subconscious at that point. All my later articles not only refer to my Maxims, but they also call back to defensive patterns.]

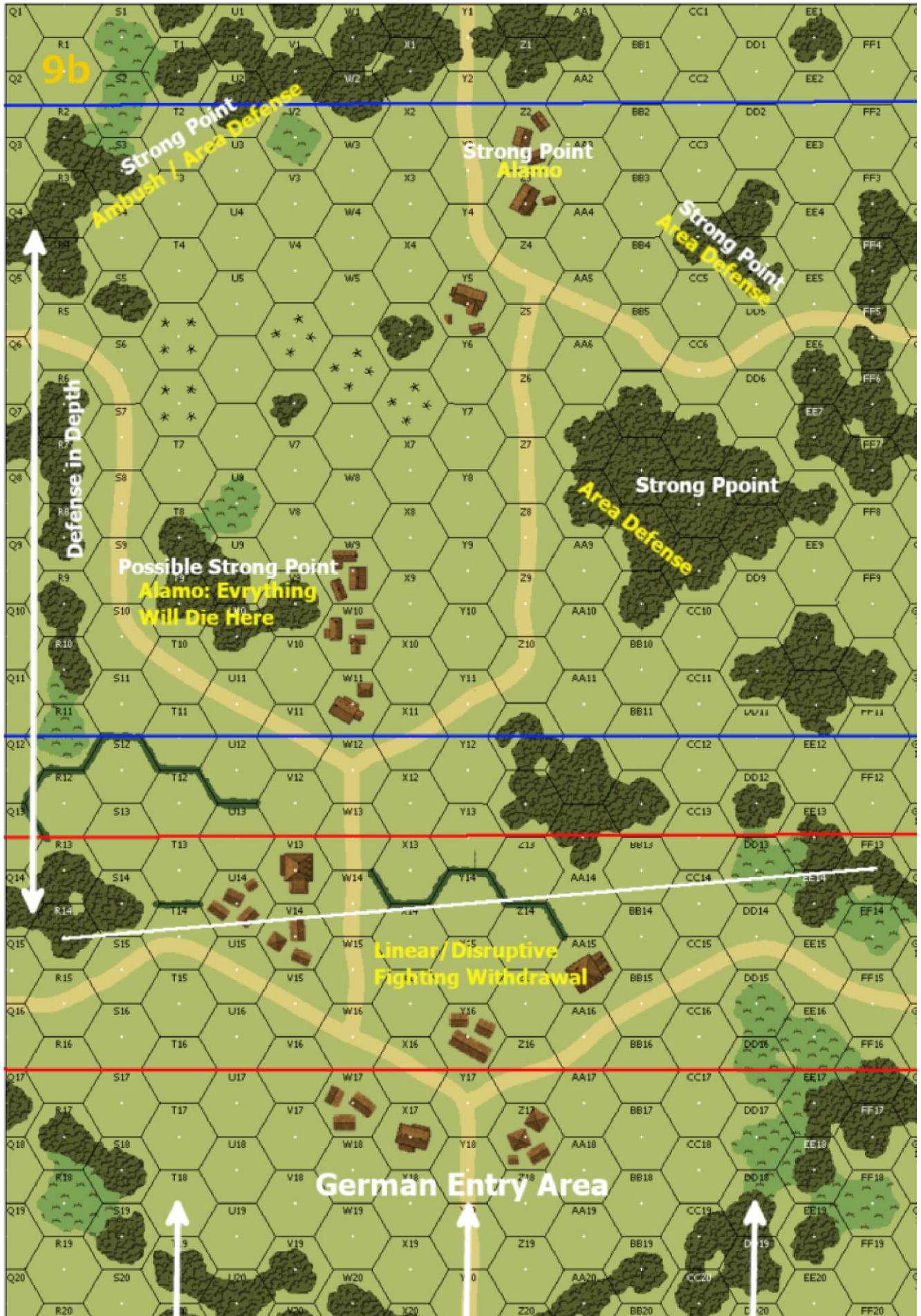
## An Example

I recently played **DB169 Sternbeck's Sortie** from Dispatches from the Bunker. I was playing defense. Before laying out a plan, I examined the scenario card and terrain under my [ASL Tactical Maxims](#). This examination resulted in the following observations:

- I only needed to hold one building to win
  - I could also win by gaining  $\geq 35$  CVP
  - There are 39 total CVP of AFVs in the German OB
- The M10 GMC has a Base TK # of 17, easily able to defeat German armor
  - They also have a ROF of 2
  - One M10 sets up HIP and can be used for an ambush, potentially bagging multiple German AFVs
  - Two BAZ also setup HIP and might ambush German armor
- German mobility exceeds my own
  - A Linear pattern will not work
  - Sadly, setup instructions dictate units set up in up front locations
  - These units will have to conduct a Fighting Withdrawal
  - Will not work if the Germans aggressively push his armor on turn 1
- Because of German mobility, I must conduct a Defense in Depth
  - Absorb the attack into the heart of my defense
  - Whittle away his Infantry so he cannot take buildings
  - Kill AFV where I can to put a strain on the CVP cap

My analysis covered more than I present here but I don't want to do a full scenario review within this article. Suffice it to say, I developed an idea of each side's strengths and weaknesses. From there, I decided which piece of the German VC I could deny my opponent with the least amount of effort. I then identified Strong Points and deployed my units accordingly. The image below shows my initial thoughts.



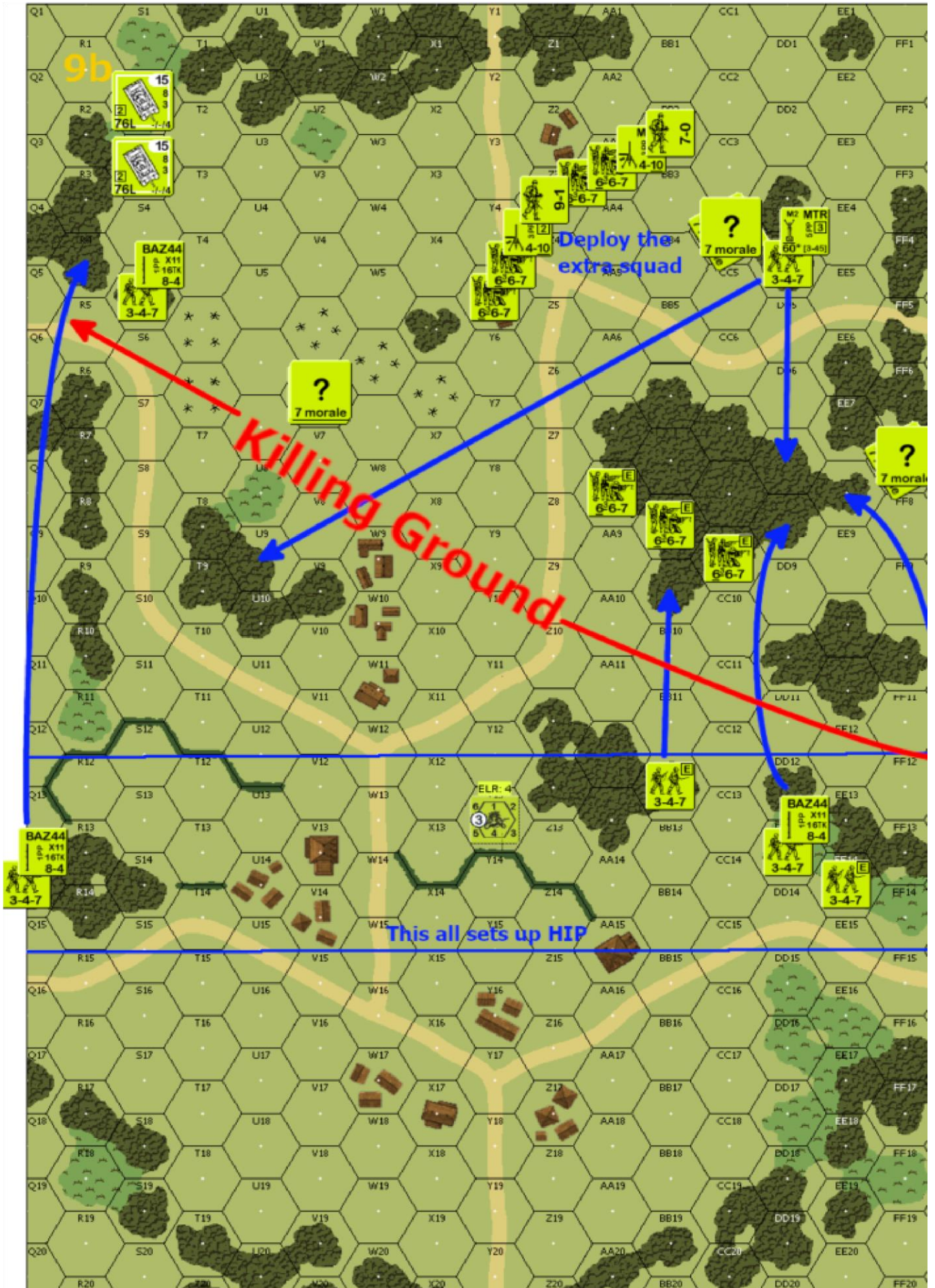




## Initial Plan

This next image shows the actual implementation of my plan.





A couple of notes about this plan:

- I pegged my win to holding Z2/Z3
  - Either makes me the winner
  - I also have ambush opportunities to threaten the CVP cap
    - This should slow the Germans down some
- Everything between the blue lines sets up Hidden per SSR
  - The blue “curved” arrows show my fall-back plan
  - The most critical move is the 8-1/MMG/HS combo, who must get back to woods mass to provide a leader for that Strong Point
- Concealment counters are representing the one remaining GMC which sets up on board
  - I am hoping to sew a little doubt in my opponent’s mind
  - The fact the Hidden and REAL GMC are side by side should be a surprise
- The M10 GMC in S3 is also Hidden
  - The GMC are there to provide fire support along a line from Z8 to CC12
- The woods mass around CC7 is potentially a die to the last man Strong Point
  - Getting through Open Ground with this much firepower will be hard
  - Fire lanes can make movement even more restricted
- The BAZ falling back to DD8 needs to be in a place to cover ground not covered by the GMCs
  - This fallback is not written in stone
  - This HS does have to hide from German Infantry

## A Last Word

So, there we have it. How I think about defense in a few short pages. If you have read Toby’s excellent article, you should be able to see remarkable similarities in our approaches. Identify locations to defend from. Assign units to those locations. Divvy up SW. And then wait for the enemy.

Although Toby didn’t mention it in his article, I would venture a guess he is even semi-thinking about many of the same things I highlight here. I think most good players think like this on at least a subconscious level.

If you have a look at the scenarios I have analyzed on my blog, you will see many of these ideas embodied in those analyses. Even as I was writing those articles, the ideas brought forth here are pervading through those articles. I will use the terms in this document in the future as I continue to write more scenario analyses.

## A Word Of Thanks!

I would like to thank several unsung heroes. First, **Toby Pilling** without whose article I never would have thought to put this into words. **David Garvin** and **HongKongWargamer** took an early version of this article and helped me to better focus on the final product. **Andy Hershey** helped refine the second version. Finally, **Mike Balis**, **Michael Hastrup-Leth**, and **Martin Vicca** reviewed the 70% solution and provided me with some excellent suggestions for the final product. **Mike Balis** was kind enough to read it one last time before I pressed publish. I alone remain responsible for any errors, but this product wouldn't be what it is without their help. Thanks, guys.

[ **Editor's Note:** One thing that most don't see is the contributions made by editors and friendly readers who send me suggestions on how to improve my articles. It was a proofreader who suggested a table in my *Prisoners. Take 'Em or Leave 'Em* article condensing pages of text into a simple table. It seems such a simple thing, but it was such a huge improvement in the article. That suggestion came from Michal Sedlacko.

Without the contributions these people make, my articles would be half of what they are when you see them. They let me know when my articles miss the mark, or more importantly, when my articles are just bad. I cannot thank these people enough. They make everything better. Sadly, the mistakes remain all my own.

At last, we come to the final article in this series: *Attacking in ASL*. By the time I authored this, I had fully embraced my Maxims in my conscious thought.]

## Attacking in ASL



This article was originally published in [From the Cellar #12](#) from Le Franc Tireur. Xavier has given me the green light to republish this article here. It was always my intent to place this article here, but only after sales of FTC 12 tailed off. LFT still has some in stock so please go get one.

When published, I also published a companion post [here](#). The information contained in that post will generally be back inline here on this blog post. Still, it is worth looking there to make sure you can find all the reference material.

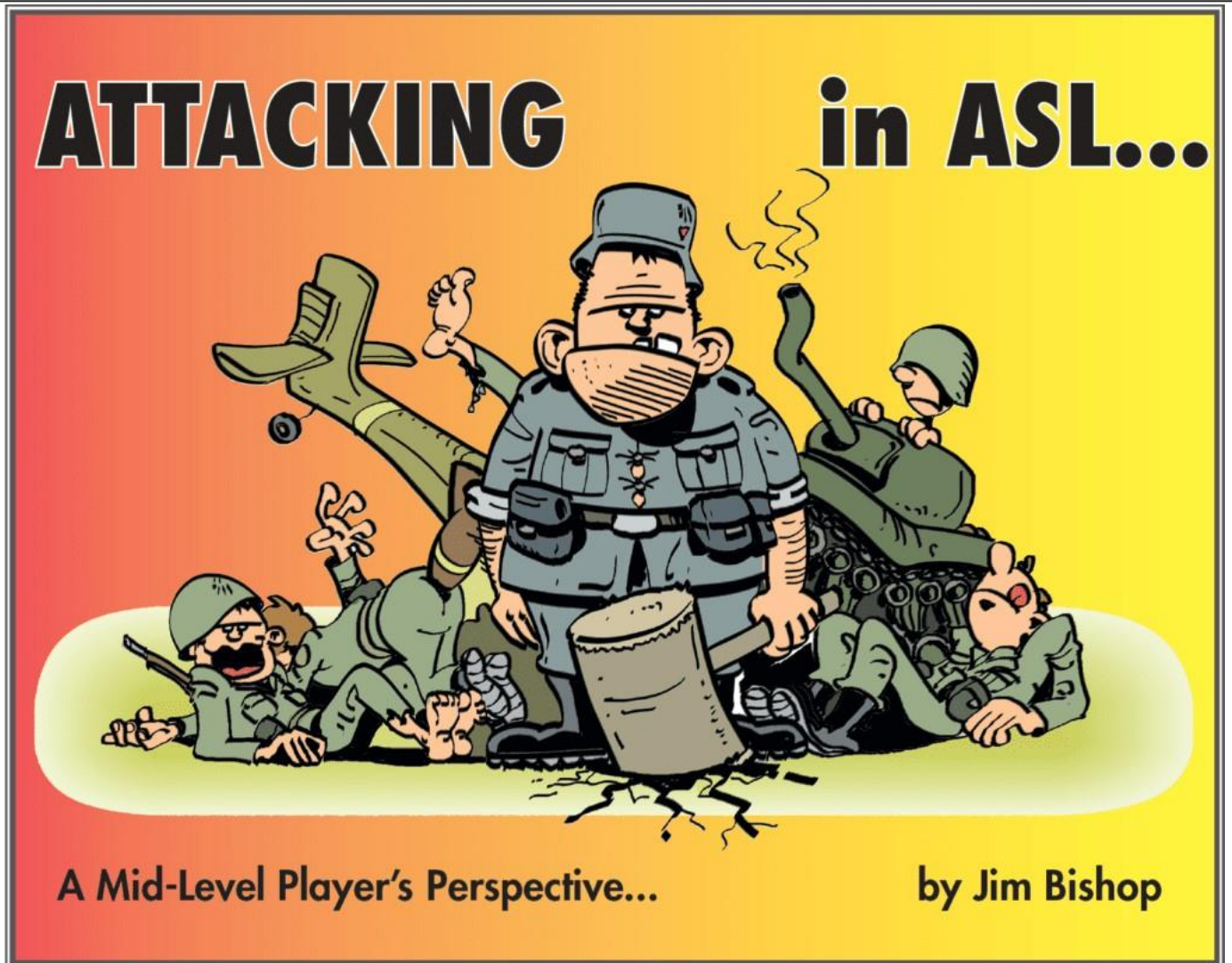
[**Editor's Note:** This companion post on my blog contains links to related articles and topics. Included in there is a series of articles I wrote covering the application of my Maxims in scenario analysis, tactical discussions, and the thoughts of other authors on this subject. I recommend you go have a look at these.]

There are some slight changes compared to the print article. Xavier has graciously allowed me to use the original artwork from the magazine. I am generally going to avoid that. I think the artwork in the magazine is



awesome and really makes the article pop. If I were to use that here, there would be no reason to go purchase the magazine. As such, I will be using the artwork I originally submitted with the article.

Unfortunately, there are also a few clarifications to make in the original article as well as one mistake to correct. I will point these changes out when I make them. Without further ado.



After reading Toby Pilling's excellent article, *A Player's Guide to A Self Defence* in Le Franc Tireur's [From the Cellar #11](#), I began thinking about what a corresponding Attacking in ASL article would look like. As I have admitted before, [I am not sure I am anything more than an average player myself](#). I am under no illusion that I am as accomplished a player as Toby. Still, I have had some success, placing 4th overall in the ASLOk GROFAZ tournament in 2014 and winning the Texas Team Tournament in 2016.



In [Illuminating Rounds #63](#), Toby spoke at some length about his defensive manual and briefly mentioned the need for an attacking manual. When asked, Toby admitted there is no way he is going to write such an article. I pondered what such an article would look like. What follows is my guideline for attacking in ASL.

I have broken the attack down into three specific sequences: Pre-Game, In-Game, and Post-Game. This article won't discuss the post-Game sequence, that is for learning. This article will only consider game play.

Lastly, I will not proclaim this is the definitive How to Attack in ASL article ever written. I don't have that much hubris. I do hope this will spark some discussion in the various online ASL communities. ASL is a hard game to play and a harder game to master. I write this for all the new and beginning players. I hope this helps to lower the mountain we are all trying to climb. Don't fool yourself though. Attacking is the most difficult task in Advanced Squad Leader.

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### The 10-11 Commandments of Attacking

As the Attacker in ASL, winning and losing is up to you. It is up to you to fulfill the Victory Conditions (VC) or lose. You bear the responsibility for making it all happen. I offer these simple commandments of attacking in ASL.

0. As the Attacker, you're losing. It's up to you to make that into a win.
1. Know the VC. They define how you can win.
2. Know the time allotted. It defines your pacing.
  - Monitor your progress. "Winning" one turn after the game ends is still losing.
  - A Pyrrhic victory is still a victory in ASL.
3. Plan your rout paths. Deny enemy rout paths.
4. Understand how the terrain will affect the battle.
5. Prevent skulking by putting those positions under fire.
6. If it's not needed for the VC, it's expendable.
7. Encircle at every opportunity.
8. Take important shots first – don't let the SAN rob you of a chance.
9. Bad stuff is going to happen. Who deals with it best usually wins. (Thanks Bill Cirillo)
10. READ Chapter H notes for both side's vehicles and ordnance.

**[Editor's Note:** All of these tie directly back to my Maxims.]

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## Pre-Game: Setting Yourself Up To Win

As I was thinking about this article, I kept circling back to my October 2021 article titled [My ASL Tactical Maxims](#). That article outlined my approach to breaking down an ASL scenario. It encapsulates how I lay out a plan to fulfill the VC for my chosen side. It covers both Offense and Defense and speaks to comparing and contrasting your given OB with your opponents. Where do you have the advantage? How can you use that?

The Maxims article also discusses the **Tyranny of Time**. No matter what you're playing in ASL, time is finite. It is a limited and precious resource. It is no good to accomplish the VC on turn 7 in a 6-turn scenario. As the Attacker, you should have a clock constantly ticking in your head. You should know just how much progress you need to make. You should seize opportunities to "get ahead of schedule" when presented. Time saved now is time available later to weather a setback.

The last significant topic in this article is a discussion on terrain and how it affects our planning. Terrain is the stage upon which we perform our play. Some piece of it is likely to be our aim. Some of it will stop our movement (No-Go), impede our movement (Slow-Go), or be flat out inviting (Fast-Go). At times, some of it will be "high-speed avenues of approach", the fastest way to victory. As an Attacker, these options need to figure into your planning.

I encourage you to read [My ASL Tactical Maxims](#) article, especially if you are just learning ASL or trying to get better at it. It is a little over 4 pages, see page 29. It is light on rules and heavy on planning. IMO, it is a must read to get the most out of this article. In fact, I encourage you to stop right here and go read the article again, even if you've read it. Still, that Maxims article leaves a lot of application up to the player's understanding.

To see how I apply my method, several examples are [here](#). These examples offer in-depth analysis of selected scenarios. They discuss the relative strengths and weaknesses of each side's order of battle compared to one another. Each of these articles spends considerable time examining the terrain and how it will affect maneuver through the scenario. These articles also discuss how a defense might be set up and how an attack might look. They also discuss tactics that might apply to the scenario. I encourage you to have a look at the examples to see how I go about analyzing a scenario and planning for an attack. You can do this at your own leisure.

## Know How to Win

Understanding the VC isn't enough in ASL. You must also understand how to fulfill the VC.

If the VC says to Control 5 Buildings by game end, do you know how to Control Buildings? If you don't, you better make sure you understand before the game begins or you're making the task more difficult than it already is. This applies to every VC. Know what they mean and how to fulfill them. There is a huge difference between "No Good Order Infantry within 5 hexes of hex N" and "No Unbroken Infantry within 5 hexes of hex

N". Even if you are 100% certain, discuss the VC with your opponent before the game begins. One of you may know something the other doesn't and agreeing will make the game more enjoyable for both sides?

[ **Editor's Note:** Notice the direct call back to knowing HOW to win. The Maxims have crystalized in my mind by now and I am beginning to fully realize their power.]

## Make A Plan

Based on your opponent's setup, the VC, the time available, and terrain which you must cross, make a plan that allows you a chance to succeed. As part of your plan, decide which forces will play which roles. Some will be maneuvering elements. Some will be over watch and firepower elements. Regardless of the roles you define, each unit should contribute to fulfilling your VC in some meaningful way.

Plan the route of the attack. The attack should be over terrain, providing cover (TEM) and concealment (Hindrances). Try to create positive DRMs to mitigate the potency of the enemy's defensive fire attacks. Look for approaches providing unobserved Rally Terrain. Some forces are going to break. It's best they rout to places where the Defender can't easily put them back under DM in an enemy fire or movement phase. Take a moment to look at the game board from the enemy's perspective. Does it change the way the map looks? Does it change the way the defense looks? Remember, there are No-Go, Slow-Go, and Fast-Go terrain on the board. If the Attacker can freely take the Fast-Go terrain—or easily limit the Defender's ability to put firepower into it, the attacker can "steal a turn" by covering more distance through aggressive movement. Look for opportunities to get ahead of the timeline.

[**Editor's Note:** Call back to Maxim 2, terrain analysis.]

Be sure to allow tactical flexibility. Bad things are going to happen. The Sniper is beyond control. Same goes for dice. How are you going to recover if a Sniper eliminates a leader on one side of your attack? Some things may not be recoverable, that's the nature of limited resources. Do the best you can to recover from setbacks. Having some idea of how you might react will go a long way towards making a correct decision when you're under pressure.

While you must account for your enemy's disposition, don't allow him to dictate the terms of the engagement. You're the Attacker. You move and shoot first. This gives you the initiative. Don't give it away by allowing your opponent to set the conditions or pacing. You decide where and when the engagement takes place.

## Bite Off One Piece At A Time

Examine the defensive setup to see if there are some isolated elements that can be destroyed. Use MGs and AFVs to control the Defender's ability to reinforce laterally and bring the weight of the attack down on a small portion of the defense (the *Schwerpunkt* principle). This can rupture the position wide open and put the Defender on the back foot. Destroy this piece and then look for the next piece. Don't lose sight of the VC. It does no good to destroy a piece of the Defender's OB and still be no closer to fulfilling the VC.

A well-planned attack will play to the strengths, and minimize the weaknesses, of your units. It will attempt to capitalize on the enemy's weaknesses and setup flaws. It will capitalize on the terrain to create favorable DRMs for attacking units.

A well-planned attack identifies places where its units are likely to break and anticipates where those units will rout to. As such, a leader will be available whose role is to get to that expected Rally Location and be ready to Rally them. A well-planned attack will recognize the need to sustain the weight and impetus behind the effort by shuffling units back into the attack. If your attacks seem to lose initiative and deplete over time, this is the most likely reason. **Plan to Break and How to Sustain Your Attack. Fail to do so and you will probably lose.**

### Armored Fighting Vehicles in ASL

AFVs are worthy of special consideration in ASL. They are the "Swiss Army Chainsaw" of ASL. They have a multitude of options from which to choose every time they act. Consider simply firing the MA in Prep Fire. The ability to move and fire in the MPH is unmatched in ASL and Bounding First Fire TH/TK attempts are likely far more effective than you realize. You should work the math out. It may surprise you.

AFVs which don't fire the MGs and get ROF with the MA in Bounding First Fire may opt to Bounding Fire the MA again in the AFPh. Don't overlook the chance to get Acquisition on a hard target in the AFPh, especially against Infantry units in high TEM terrain.

An AFV's mobility and invulnerability to Small Arms fire makes them an ideal candidate for cutting rout paths, taking skulk positions under fire, and impeding your opponent's ability to move. Tanks need to be supported by Infantry. Ideally, they are supported by some other AT asset such as another AFV, LATW, or Gun. Isolated AFVs are easy targets. An isolated AFV in Motion is already dead if your opponent can reach it.

Tanks can provide cover to help your Infantry in the attack. Even if they don't have a Smoke Dispenser, AFVs can try for a Vehicular Smoke Grenade. We can use AFVs for Armored Assault to provide cover for advancing Infantry. AFVs are Hindrance if they aren't in Motion and haven't moved yet, giving still another reason to weigh the sequence in which you move your pieces. An AFV can impose Target Selection Limits freeing your Infantry to close on the target.

It's not all roses for AFVs, however. They don't break. Dead AFVs don't rally. The temptation to do something with an AFV can blind you to the idea that the AFV is already where it needs to be and simply doing nothing is the right thing to do. As my friend Guy Cheney says, "Tanks don't rout!" Use yours carefully, but don't let the thought of loss paralyze you. You can find a whole series of articles covering [The Basics of AFV Combat in ASL](#) on my blog. There is a lot of information packed into those articles.

### **Roles Of AFVs As I See Them**

Dave Ramsey said in an email exchange that the roles of AFVs in complex situations baffle him. To be fair, I think they sometimes get the better of me, but I will try to convey my approach to how I use them in my games.

**Provide Cover:** An AFV in any role can provide cover. Fire which passes through its Location is subject to a +1 Hindrance DRM. They can fire Ordnance Smoke, Smoke Dispensers, or place a Vehicular Smoke Grenade. AFVs can be used for Armored Assault.

**Cutting Rout Paths:** Is there a way to coerce a group of enemy units to Surrender or eliminated them for failure to rout? Of course, you must weigh the risk/reward of such a move, but a chance to eliminate a broken 9 -2 or 10 -3 is almost always worth it. Look for these opportunities.

**Interdicting Lateral Reinforcements / Skulking Locations:** If you can sort out the Defender's movement plan, attacking AFVs can disrupt this flow of enemy units. If there are natural Skulk opportunities, seek to take these under fire from AFVs. The mobility of an AFV makes it well suited to line up these shots.

**Combat Taxi:** Whether as Riders or Passengers, AFVs can rapidly bring Infantry into the assault. Riders are vulnerable, but sometimes a necessity. This can sometimes "steal a turn" from the Defender. A turn saved early is usually more valuable later when you're under pressure to accomplish the VC.

**Support The Assault:** I assign these AFVs to my assault group and they move with the assault, trying to capture their assigned objective. These AFVs provide cover as needed, to include the RtPh. This RtPh cover can be the difference between Surrendering and Routing. These AFVs provide MG support and an MA punch to drive off enemy Infantry. When properly supported by friendly Infantry, tanks leading the assault can be a real thorn in the Defender's side. Sleaze Freeze is a common tactic among these AFVs.

**Maneuver Group:** AFVs in this role are seeking to slip through the Defender's main line of resistance to get into their tactical space. Once there, these units can make lateral reinforcement and routing a nightmare. Properly used, these units can compel the Defender to fall back or stand and die. Such use comes with risk, however. These AFVs are not likely to have a lot of friendly support. As I said earlier, isolated AFVs are easy targets. If you do this, make sure you know *The Basics of AFV Combat in ASL*, particularly the Dance of Death. These units are a threat, being where they are only if they are alive when you need them to be. Know how to keep them alive. Armored Cars or other high MP vehicles are excellent in this role.

## Infantry in ASL

There is no doubt Infantry capabilities are limited relative to their armored brethren. They lack the ability to use Bounding First Fire. Infantry doesn't have the mobility of AFVs. They are subject to Small Arms attacks. Risks on the battlefield are everywhere, but Infantry has some important advantages not available to AFVs.

Infantry can rally and get back into the action. Infantry is necessary to take and hold ground. Taking this ground is most likely a requirement to fulfill VC. Sure, an AFV can Control a Location as long as it occupies the Location, but to keep a Location after leaving it, Infantry must enter (or Mop Up in the case of Buildings) the Location.

Like my series on AFVs, I have a growing collection of articles covering [The Basics of Infantry Combat](#) in ASL as well. The series currently examines Infantry versus AFV combat, including a second series topic covering [Defending Against Sleaze Freeze](#).

Finally, this article covers Snipers in a general way. It is possible to go deeper into the mechanics of Snipers and how to minimize the impact Snipers have. Such a discussion is outside the scope of this article. If you want a deeper article on the topic, I suggest Mark Nixon's *Hyper Sniper: A SANE look at this threat in ASL*. It can be found in [The General, Volume 31, Number 2](#).

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## Example 1: The Setup

Pictured is the beginning of American turn 3 in AP 100 *Coal In Their Stocking*. I was playing the Americans. The VC comprises Building Control for the Americans and EVP/Building Control for the Germans. A very real threat for the Americans here is the AFVs getting free and exiting the north (right) edge. The Americans must also take



buildings soon as their VC compiles points for Building Control over time. So what has the German given the Americans?

Notice the isolated and in Motion SPW 250/8 (circled in red). Also note it is facing to the southwest (top left) corner of the map. The AFV is vulnerable to attack. In the center, a 4-6-8/LMG combo Pinned in the previous turn and is in a brush hex without TEM. With two halftracks (ht) and plenty of Infantry around, this should be an easy target to eliminate and break for failure to rout. Let's see how I fared with this.





how the position of the two hts make this possible and how much harder this would have been for Infantry to achieve the same result. This attack removed one piece of the German OB holding the center of the map and exploited a break achieved when the German squad pinned the previous turn.

### **Toby Pilling's Infantry Philosophy (And How My Philosophy On Attack Is Similar)**

In his article A Player's Guide to A Self Defence, Toby talks about deploying his Infantry into platoons sized elements of 3 to 4 squads each. After this, he assigns leaders into each of these platoons. Platoons without leaders are broken up into platoons with leaders and form a reserve. He then assigns SW and missions to each of these platoons. I recommend you read Toby's article as it is a masterful work. Still, keep in mind Toby is talking about defending so his mind set is completely different.

Having said that, I do something similar on the attack. I start with the mission, identifying objectives and creating battle groups necessary to achieve each of those objectives. I assign the best morale units to the assault group—a maneuver element I expect to achieve the objective. If I have units with Assault Fire, they definitely go in the assault group. I assign lesser quality units to the “wings” of the attack as support groups. They are there to inhibit lateral reinforcement. If needed, lower-quality units can reinforce the attack should it be necessary. If available, I place units with Self-Rally capability into these support groups.

I then assign leaders, putting my best leaders with the assault groups. If leadership is limited, I keep them in the rear to Rally broken units and keep the attack going. If leadership is plentiful, the best leaders will be out front leading the attack while others will be on Rally duty. Sometimes, support groups will not get leaders. I try to keep a leader in support groups with key SWs, but this isn't always possible. If I have crews to man these SWs, they are a natural fit given their Self-Rally Capability.

Next, I assign SWs to each of the groups. I expect my assault group to be moving so they will not have any 4/5 PP SWs assigned. Otherwise, I will put a lot of LMGs, Flamethrowers, DCs, and some LATW in the assault group. Units in the “wings” get the heavier SWs and some of the LATW. I expect these units to move during the game, but long-range weapons are better suited to their mission. They need to support the attack and cut off lateral reinforcement as the attack progresses. Since the wing elements won't see much AFV support, they need some LATW to have a fighting chance against enemy armor.

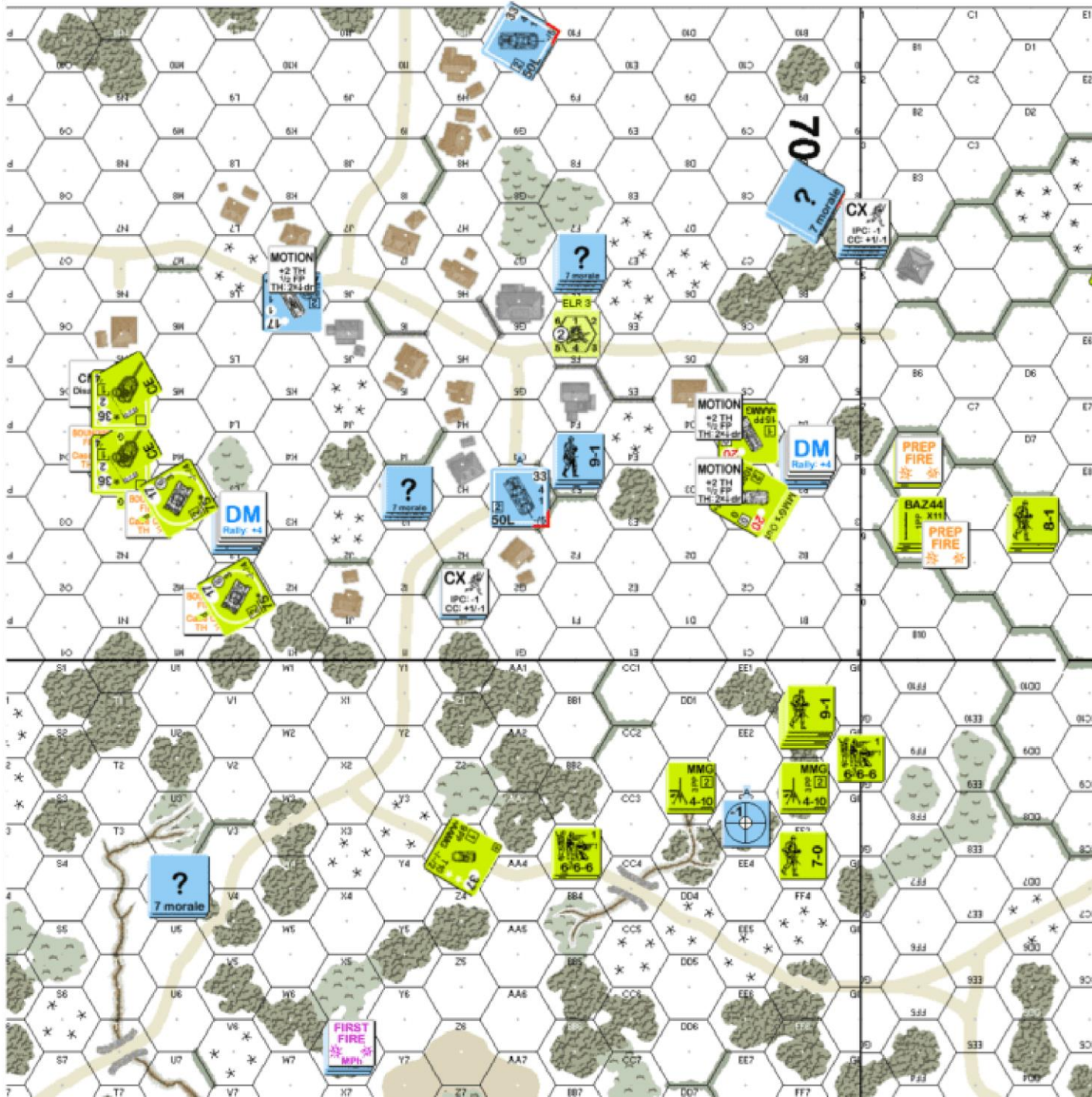
Finally, I assign any AFVs to each of these groups, favoring support of the assault group. Given everything an AFV does, I expect them to move so they are a natural fit for the assault group. I keep the AFVs in close contact with the assault group and cluster LATW around my AFVs. This allows the Infantry to keep enemy Infantry at bay while also presenting a threat to enemy AFVs. The AFVs provide a mobile pillbox to support the attack, cover as Hindrance or Armored Assault, SMOKE, and an MA punch if needed. If it comes to it, AFVs can also “sleaze freeze” a key position allowing Infantry to close on the Location and reduce it through fire.

### Example 2: Taking What Is Given, One Bite At A Time

This image represents the AFV battle at the end of the turn. The Germans revealed a CX 46-7/LMG combo in L2 when the first Greyhound moved N1 to N4. The German unit opted for the 6+3 shot rather than attempting a *panzerfaust* shot. Even had the squad succeeded on its *panzerfaust* check dr, the Basic TH# at 3 hexes is a 6. There is a +2 DRM for Case J, a +1 DRM for Case P, and +1 DRM for being CX. Unfortunately for the German player, the result was no effect.

The 4-6-7 covered and was marked Final Fired. The rest of the AFVs stream forward. One Greyhound took a Bounding First Fire shot and missed. The rest opt to shoot in AFPh to gain Acquisition. In the AFPh, every AAMG first shot at the 4-6-7 for a 2/4 flat shot. The German squad shook off the only morale check it took from the hail of bullets. The M8 HMC in L1 cracks a shot with the MA and rolls a 1,2 TH and finally breaks the squad. Every other gun acquired the hapless SPW 250/8. They eliminate the SPW 250/8 in the next German MPH. Sadly, the broken German unit could rout away.





From a macro point of view, these moves opened the center of the map for American maneuver and placed four AFVs in the German rear unopposed by armor. It isn't without risk, however. As you can see from the map, only two American M5A1s are holding the exit. The concealed German AFV in 70B7 is a JgPz IV, practically invulnerable to the M5A1s frontally. Still, with the proximity of the road, the Greyhounds are close enough to chase down and swarm the JgPz IV if it makes a break for exit. The Puma is also a threat, but one which is well within reach of the M5A1s. As luck would have it, the 60mm mortar eliminated one Puma in the next German Player Turn as well.

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## Other Random Considerations in the Pre-Game

- Pillbox Control is a chore. A broken unit cannot be forced to rout from one and can deny an enemy entry into it. Units inside and outside can engage in CC. If you need Control of the Pillbox, you need to plan on how to get inside. If it isn't empty, getting inside can take a second turn. Plan accordingly.
- Just like Pillboxes, Fortified Building Locations can be a chore to enter and Control. An unpinned, Good Order, armed enemy squad (or its equivalent) is enough to deny any number of friendly units from entering the Location. An AFV entering the Location may breach these positions—not just in bypass—or a DC can be placed to Breach. Of course, an attack which breaks or pins units in the Fortified Location will also make entry possible. If Fortified Locations are in the game, you must account for this in your planning.
- Understand how to count Casualty Victory Points (CVP). Sometimes these will count as true CVP. Other times, these may count as Exit VP (EVP) awarded as CVP. Sometimes a scenario SSR will dictate a different method of counting. Don't forget that Prisoners and captured enemy equipment are normally worth double unless negated by VC/SSR. Again, discuss this with your opponent as the game goes along to ensure you both have the same idea of what the CVP/EVP currently are.
- Multi-level buildings take time to capture. Units can break and rout upstairs denying Control for a turn or more, so be sure to account for the vertical distance needed to travel as part of your planning. If the only way up is via Stairwells, this presents an even greater challenge.
- Also, keep in mind that "Building Control" and "Building Location Control" are two different things. It is possible to Control the Building and not Control all the Locations within that Building. You can either enter every Location in that Building or Mop it up to gain Control of each Location in a Building.
- "Building Hex Control" is different again. It is possible to Control a building but not the hex the unit is in if an enemy armed vehicle is in bypass there (A26.11).
  - If your enemy has HIP units, Mopping Up a Building will put them on board and make sure you discover them while you can still deal with them. A HIP unit bypassed in an upper-level Location has resulted in many lost games.
  - Don't forget the Rooftop Locations. Rooftops are Concealment Terrain for Setup purpose and units may HIP there. Such units will remain HIP if there are no enemy units in LOS and at the same or higher level.
  - Rooftop units can't deny Building Control or Building Location Control, but they can deny Hex Control and easily regain Control if not discovered.
  - You can't Mop Up if you have declared No Quarter.

- For Building Location Control, Infantry must enter every Location in a building to gain Control.
- Finding HIP units in upper-level Locations (bug hunt) becomes very challenging.
- Kick your enemy when he is down. If you can reasonably put his units back under DM, do so. Of course, weigh the risk of being broken yourself if you remain exposed to enemy fire.
  - Weigh this against the possibility of HOB or SAN. If that broken unit is a Location to cause you havoc as a Berserk unit—or worse yet—a Rallied unit with a shiny new hero, consider the risk value proposition. This is hard to convey, but you should learn it with practice.
  - If you can maneuver to eliminate enemies for failure to rout, you should ALMOST always do this, particularly if you have a HS/Crew/Hero lying around.
  - Try to minimize the impact of the enemy SAN. This doesn't mean to pass up on low odds shots. You should take some of those low odd shots.
  - A well-placed HS in lower TEM can soak up a Sniper Attack for more valuable units. So can a Dummy unit. Remember, Snipers only move on “spokes”. Look at the position of the SAN counter, envision how it moves, and plan accordingly ○ Take shots nearer the SAN first, especially if they are important to your goal. If the SAN activates, at least those important shots have already been taken and you won't miss out on them.
- Don't let a SAN worry you too much. Even a high SAN number shouldn't overly concern you.
  - Even if you roll his SAN, he still has to roll a 1 or 2 to activate it (33%). Even if it activates, 50% of its attacks will only pin MMCs, Wound SMCs, and little stun AFVs.
  - You are going to get punished in unexpected ways by a SAN, you just can't let something neither side has control over blunt your attack
  - Some people recommend not taking a shot if the SAN is higher than the DR you need to achieve a NMC (e.g. don't take a 2 +2 shot if his SAN is 4 or higher). I disagree with this as the chance of a SAN hurting you is 1/3 of the chance you achieve a result. Instead, I look at the position of the SAN and asks if the risk of the worst possible thing happening is worth the elimination of the unit being targeted (e.g. don't risk your 9-2 to shoot a broken Conscript half squad).
- SMOKE. If you have it, use it. Even if you think you're using it enough, chances are you aren't.
  - This includes Infantry with Smoke Grenades. There is no harm in using remaining MFs trying for Smoke Grenades “just because”.
  - Don't forget WP Smoke Grenades if you're playing the Americans (or 1944+ British, Elite Japanese Squads at any date, or G.M.D. 5-3-7 squads). Getting them is pretty random, but dropping a WP grenade into an enemy unit's Location can come as a nasty surprise for your opponent.
- Know your Atypical LOS situations.

- You can gain more FFMO/FFNAM shots than you think.
- Going uphill, vertex aiming points, road hexsides in a Woods-Road hex.
- Take notes on rules you learn or situations that come up.
  - Don't slow the game, but don't rely on your memory.
  - Doing so will help you learn and get better at the game.
- More games are won by cracking your opponent's Personal Morale (PMC) than any other method.
  - This includes you. You must be resilient in the face of pressure.
  - Keeping a calm demeanor lessens the impact of good/ bad DRs.
  - This doesn't mean you should attack his PMC through commentary. The game will do that all on its own. Don't be a bad sport.
  - I wish I could practice what I preach here ☹️ Those who can do, those who can't write about it in blogs.

### **During Game: Things To Consider While Playing**

So far, we have spoken mostly about planning our attack. A plan is important. Failure to plan will go a long way towards ensuring your loss, but planning isn't enough. Attackers must react to what happens during play. Sometimes, this means slowing the attack and sometimes this means pressing the advantage. This next section covers adapting the plan to the local conditions on the map.

As this article progresses, keep in mind the turn-based nature of ASL. Keep upcoming turns in mind. Failure to do so will cause a disjointed and diffused attack. I will try to point some of this out as I go through the game phases, but this discussion might jar the reader, seemingly coming from out of context. Better jarring here than jarring on the ASL battlefield.

### **Rally Phase**

This phase becomes increasingly important as the game progresses. At the beginning of each Player Turn, we know the carnage from the previous Player Turn. It is here we must pick up the wreckage and feed units back into the attack.

Still, it isn't enough to consider the Rally Phase just when you flip the turn counter over. As the Attacker, begin planning the next Rally Phase in your MPh. The Attacker decides the point of attack and should know where units are likely to break. Knowing this, the Attacker should have some idea about how and where units will rout. The Attacker needs to identify and move "Rally leaders" to these Locations in the MPh. This is why "Rally leaders" often move last. If you often find your units trying to Self-Rally, this is likely because you are not



planning routs early enough or moving all your leaders without knowing where broken units will rout to. Failure to plan also leads to attacks losing momentum or being disjointed.

When planning rout paths, ensure Rally Locations are out of the Defender's LOS. Keeping units under DM will be a Defender's priority. Doing so will slow the attack. Having multiple units taking Morale Checks while broken presents an opportunity hard to ignore.

### **Reassessing The Attack**

Another benefit of seeing the carnage is the chance to reassess the avenue of approach being taken. Perhaps it is time to shift the axis of approach based on some local condition. If the Defender has taken excessive casualties, it may be time to reinforce the attack there. Perhaps consolidating local gains and recovering is in order if the attack has suffered excessive casualties. If the Defender is expected to counter-attack, perhaps it's time to consider how to receive this attack. See the example below.

The Attacker must account for reinforcements in his planning, it is here the Attacker decides where to employ them. Seeing the casualties on both sides, the Attacker can enter his forces where they will have the greatest impact. Knowing where the Defender's reinforcements may come from, perhaps the Attacker can move to interdict their entry and slow the defensive help. Remember, the Attacker has the initiative. The Attacker decides when and where the conflict takes place. The Attacker must use this to his advantage. Reassess your plan and change it as needed to ensure this continues to be the case. Change your plans to cut off lateral reinforcements as needed. Shift the focus of the attack if necessary. Take what the Defender gives you, but do so at a time of your choosing. Don't let the Defender distract you from your objectives.

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### **Example 3: AP100, Reassessing The Attack**

In this example, it is the beginning of the American Turn 4 in AP100 Coal In Their Stocking. The Americans win at game end by amassing more Victory Points than the Germans. The Americans gain 2 VP for each Stone Building they Control (circled in green) at the end of each Game Turn. Similarly, the Germans gain 3 VP for each Stone Building they Control at game end AND they gain EVP. At this point, the Americans are gaining NO VP. Additionally, the Germans are threatening to exit units off the north (right) edge of the map.

### ***What can the Americans do to win?***



As the American player, my plan was to take the B4 Building this turn. That would give me 6 VP at game end. I am easily in position to capture F4 and G6 by game end. That would give me 10 accumulated VPs. Assuming the Germans held on to the two remaining Buildings, the Germans would have 6 VP and the Americans easily win. This makes stopping the JgPz IV crucial to the American chances here. The JgPz IV is 7 VP if it gets off the map, meaning I will have to take one more building to win if it exits.

The blue arrows represent my thinking as I was playing the game. First, the units attempting to exit must be cut off or eliminated. I started with the 60mm mortar attacking the JgPz IV in Prep Fire to no avail. The odds weren't great, but if I could eliminate, Immobilize, or Shock the TD, it would free up other units to move on to other objectives in the MPh.

In the MPh, I moved the Jeep first. I did this in case it would entice the JgPz IV to shoot. If it shoots, it cannot subsequently make a Motion attempt (unless it kept ROF) or use a Smoke Dispenser. My opponent did not fire. This put a 2-FP MG in place to cut off the Concealed MMC's exit. I don't know it at this point, but that is a single half squad (1 EVP) there.

I next opted to move one of the M5A1s. My reasoning for this is twofold: if the first one can eliminate the JgPz IV, the other is free to attack into the village. Second, if I cannot eliminate the JgPz IV with the first M5A1, I may need to bring the M8 Greyhounds on the N hexrow over to make sure I have enough chances to kill the JgPz IV.

As it turned out, the first M5A1 moved to the rear of the JgPz IV. My opponent declared a shot on the Stop MP and I declared a Gun Duel. I won the Gun Duel and shot first, failing to eliminate the TD. The return shot broke the JgPz IV's MA. The second M5A1 closed to take a flank shot and eliminated the JgPz IV. With its remaining MPs, the second M5A1 moved to support the Jeep against the concealed unit. This concealed unit was broken in the German MPh and could be easily rounded up by the Jeep.

The two halftracks moved next. They each "sleaze froze" units in the defense, particularly the 9-1/HMG combo in F3 and the (soon to be revealed) half squad/Panzerschreck combo in C6. Of note, as the ht moved to freeze the 9-1/HMG combo, I moved via the Puma's hex and placed a Vehicular Smoke Grenade in its hex. Because of this, I easily captured the B4 and the F4 buildings.

The now freed M8 Greyhounds moved to the F8 area to get encircling shots and cause routing problems for the German Infantry. One of the M8 HMCs moved to I4. Doing this set up the broken unit there for a failure to rout at the risk of a Panzerfaust shot from a leader. This same M8 took a Bounding Fire shot in the AFPh to eliminate the remaining Puma with a HEAT round.

In CC, the 9-1 eliminated the freezing ht, but did so as a Burning Wreck. With the additional +3 DRM, the 9 - 1/HMG combo could not break my unit in F4 in his Player Turn. When the 9-1 advanced into F4 for CC, neither side was hurt but I gained 2 VP for Controlling the Location. At this point, I had 4 VP. I was going to gain another

4 VP by controlling B4, meaning I would have at least 8 VP at game end. I had 8 squads bearing down on H3 and G6. Capturing either would mean the most he could have at game end was 6 VP. In addition, I had nearly all of my AFVs and no CVP cap. Knowing I could “freeze my way to victory”, my opponent conceded at the end of his turn 4.

My attack was aggressive, but not reckless. I only lost one half squad through the first 4 turns. When my units broke, I had a leader in position to rally the troops back into the fray.

Of further note, reading the Vehicle Notes was important here. The American M3 MMG ht includes a full 6-6-6 squad as a Passenger. This unit isn't on the card. Furthermore, the Passenger can unload and take two dismantled MMGs as it disembarks. I took advantage of this to upgrade my firepower. This also meant the 6-6-6 Passenger could now break, rout, and rally rather than risk a Crew Survival DR.

### **Do Not Forget The Defender's Player Turn**

When planning for the upcoming turn, don't forget the Defender gets a say too. The Defender may opt to shoot your units. If this happens, where will your broken units go? Having a leader there to police up and feed these units back into the attack will be a key part of a successful attack.

Also, as the Attacker, planning on how to bring skulking positions under fire is the key to stopping your opponent from skulking. Being able to do this will often encourage the Defender to fall back. If you can interdict this repositioning, breaking units in Defensive First Fire and Defensive Fire is a powerful way to unhinge a defense. Units broken through Defensive Fire will attempt to Rally in your Player Turn under DM. This penalty will make it improbable these units will come back. Furthermore, the movement of broken units is not completely under the control of the Defender. Attacking these units in the AFPh or moving ADJACENT to them in the APh will make them DM again. Better yet, aggressive movement might just make it possible to eliminate those units for failure to rout.



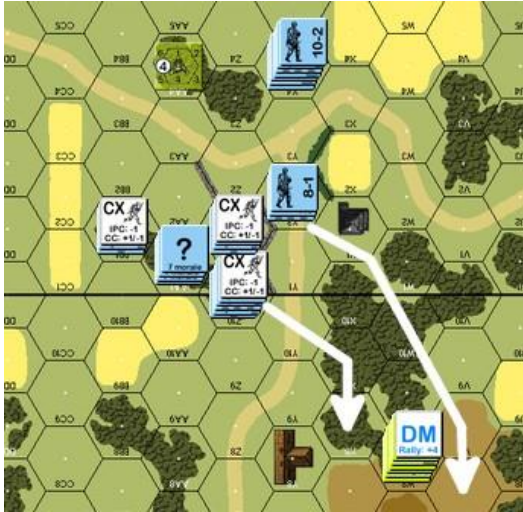
### Example: Planning for the Upcoming Turn



Pictured is a portion of the board from a VASL game I watched. In it, the German player is on the attack. In his Defensive Fire, the German 10-2 stack broke some American units, which subsequently routed to W8.

In the German Player Turn, the units in W8 failed to Rally. The German player elected not to fire any of his units. It is now the German player's MPh. How can we safely eliminate the units in W8?

Here we see a plan of movement which accomplishes just that. The 8-1 stack in Y2 declares Double Time. It moves in Bypass of X1 and W1, through the Woods in W10, Bypasses W9, pays 2 MFs to get into V8 and ends its MPh in V7. At no time will this move come under fire from the Americans.



The units in Z1/Z10 (board seam) are CX. Fortunately, there is an 8-1 leader there. They lose CX at the beginning of their MPH and follow the path for 5 MFs. Now the American unit has no rout path available which does not move adjacent to a KEU.

Even though the units in V7 are CX (and unable to Interdict), the broken units in W8 would first attempt to Surrender. If the German play elects to not take Prisoners, eliminate the broken units for failure to rout.

### Other Random Considerations For Rally Phase

- Deploy as needed
  - Two half squads can carry more portage points than one full squad.
  - IJA half squads don't stripe and can recombine later.
    - They break in one step, whilst full squads take three steps to break. When recombined at the destination, they return to Full-Strength squads.
  - Speaking of recombining, consider recombining half squads where needed.
    - Gain CC value.
    - Gain more fire opportunities—full squads can shoot inherent firepower and SW where a HS cannot.
    - Can do this in either player's RPh. This action requires a leader.
- Recover things you can.
  - Especially enemy CVP items which are doubled at game end in CVP games.
  - Especially enemy items which must be destroyed/eliminated/not possessed by game end.
- Don't forget to repair.
  - Be careful repairing AFV main armaments.

- Tanks are so much more than just the Gun.
- Losing everything else an AFV can do even without a MA can be devastating.
- Transfer SW and items as needed.
  - Take SW from CX units and give them to non-CX units to avoid the +1 DRM.
  - Give SW to units capable of using them without penalty (e.g. transfer a DC from a non-elite unit to an elite unit).
- This is one of two times you can transfer/Abandon Prisoners.
  - You may deploy units not normally able to deploy when handling Prisoners.
  - Abuse this if you need to, especially with Russian Troops.
  - Note, transfer of Prisoners does not count against other Rally Phase options for units giving or receiving Prisoners.
- Don't forget to roll Shock/Unknown recovery dr.

## Prep Fire

The PFP is a hard topic to tackle. No other phase is as confounding as the PFP. Many people will tell you to shoot. Top players will tell you if you're shooting, you're losing and then shoot some of their troops themselves.

There are only a few rules set in concrete. Flip or remove any of your own SMOKE counters currently in play at the beginning of the phase. Make sure you account for the reduced/removed Hindrance DRM in your RPh planning. Next, should you choose place Ordnance SMOKE first. After that, OBA SMOKE followed by OBA if available. Beyond those, the rest of the phase is a series of tradeoffs.

Any unit which Prep Fires or Opportunity Fires cannot move in the upcoming MPh. These units also lose any concealment they may have had. As the Attacker, movement is likely a requirement to win. Your movement should include a plan to stop the Defender from laterally reinforcing his defense to blunt your attack. Fire lanes in your upcoming Defensive First Fire are good for this.

Weigh all of this against the need to move. Breaking enemy units at the point of attack is likely to free up movement opportunities for other units. Sometimes, it may be better to Opportunity Fire units in order to bring the full weight of your firepower to bear in the AFP after your movement has induced the Defender to drop concealment. Also note, units which Opportunity Fire can avoid the Case C3 DRM for firing LATW under Desperation. Of course, the unit will have to survive Defensive Fire to take advantage, so this isn't without its downsides.

After all of this, the best that can be said about Prep Firing is that it is a learning process. Keep in mind the time remaining to accomplish your mission. If you have plenty of time, there are more chances to Prep Fire. If time is





running short, lean towards movement. Still, there may be some key defensive positions needing neutralization to free up movement options. Sometimes, this means firing in Prep Fire. Sometimes, AFVs can deal with them in Bounding Fire or other ways (e.g., “Sleaze Freeze”).

Try to keep in mind the order in which you fire shots. Some orders are better than others. Shots closer to the enemy Sniper counter are best taken first lest an active SAN break or pin these units first. Early shots that break or pin a unit can free other units to move more aggressively forward. Encirclement must be done sequentially and can be an exception to taking big shots first: a low-FP shot first followed by a higher-FP shot that completes the encirclement has a better chance of breaking the target.

Unfortunately, all of this is something learned by playing, so pay attention to the way you order your attacks and ask yourself if you could have done better.

### **Other Random Considerations For Prep Fire Phase**

- Don't forget “mop up”.
- Don't forget Entrenchment DRs (but also don't forget these can generate a SAN).
  - Designate new spotters, when otherwise allowed to.
- Limber/un-limber Guns and mark the Crew TI.

### **Movement Phase**

American General George S. Patton Jr. once said, “A good plan executed violently now is better than a perfect plan next week.” The same holds true for ASL. When in doubt, attack aggressively and keep your opponent under pressure. Don't confuse aggression with recklessness, however. Sometimes, there is a very fine line between the two.

## AFVs In The Movement Phase—More Powerful Than You Think

I have written a whole series of articles covering the [Basics of AFV Combat](#) in ASL, so I will not repeat all of that material here. I recommend you read them and try to think about AFVs in an attacking context. Still, I will repeat some points made in those articles.

AFVs are the most powerful pieces in ASL. Their ability to move, place Smoke, shoot, and provide cover for assaulting Infantry is unmatched in the game. Even when eliminated, their wrecks can continue to provide some cover to your remaining units. As I have said in other articles, don't be afraid to lose AFVs if their elimination leads to victory. There are some special risks you must know as the Attacker and account for them in your plans.

AFVs in bypass are vulnerable to being shot in the side. Be aware of this and try to limit the Defender's opportunities to take side-shots. Still, bypassing in the right place can provide shots and opportunities your opponent didn't expect.

Understanding Gun Duels can be the difference between a functioning AFV and a Burning Wreck. Even for Gun Duels you can't win, declaring a Gun Duel ensures your AFV gets the next shot if it survives.

Know the Dance of Death. Unless your AFV is nearly invulnerable to all enemy fire, taking on an enemy AFV one versus one is rarely a good idea. Knowing how the enemy AFV might defend, what its options are, and how you can create the best odds for success is often key to taking out an enemy AFV. Placing Smoke or dropping a Rider in an enemy AFV's Location inflicts target selection limits on it and reduces the enemy tanks options.

Hull-Down positions significantly reduce the risk to your AFVs. Don't forget to roll for pregame Hull-Down maneuvers if your AFVs qualify, even if you plan on moving them anyway.

Beware of DI shots. Not all mission kills result in the AFV's elimination.

Aggressive play recognizes the risk and does the best it can to reduce the risks. Dashing, Smoke, and Sleaze Freeze are all examples of risk mitigation. Moving with half squads first to draw fire and limit Subsequent First Fire options can also reduce the risk for follow on movements. Use the terrain to reduce the risk further. TEM and Hindrances can eliminate or reduce negative DRMs. The proper use of Smoke is a must. Staying out of LOS behind cover or in Blind hexes eliminates the risk altogether.

As the Attacker, movement is a must. The attack must progress against a ticking clock. When in doubt, move. If your units have Assault Fire, they should almost always be moving rather than firing. If they get adjacent to

enemy Locations, they almost always have more firepower after movement than before. Don't underestimate the value of multi-hex fire groups in the AFPh, particularly if your units have Assault Fire.

During your Movement Phase, keep in mind the Defender's upcoming turn. Which units are likely to skulk? Is the enemy likely to fall back to a second line of defense? Maneuver to place his skulk Locations under fire or interdict his escape path. Try to force your opponent to make hard decisions under pressure.

As the Attacker, expect some of your units are going to break on the attack. Even while we make best efforts to reduce risk, good DRs happen. Something is going to break. As the Attacker, you must identify which leaders are "Rally Machines." It will be the role of these leaders to lag the attack and round up broken units so they can be fed back into the attack.

As your units break, take a movement to figure out where that unit is going to rout to.

Can it rout? If it can't rout, does it need some type of cover to avoid Interdiction?

Sometimes it is necessary to create some form of cover to even make routing possible. As the Attacker, account for these things. Once we identify the rout destination, you know you must move the "Rally Machine" there before turn's end. As you continue to move, try to move in such a way that anything breaking will rout to the same Location or have more "Rally Machines" identified to move to those other rout destinations. The key to a relentless attack is cycling units back into the attack as quickly as possible.

I have alluded to how important the order of movement can be, but I haven't addressed it directly yet. There are no hard and fast rules to offer in this, but there are some things to consider:

- Move "Rally Machines" only when it is safe to, often last.
- Carefully consider when to move AFVs.
  - Do they need to provide cover for the assault?
  - Do they need to provide cover for routing?
  - Can they get into position to interdict skulking or withdrawal paths?
  - Can they take a Bounding First Fire shot in lieu of a Prep Fire shot?
- Move low value units to draw fire and limit Subsequent First Fire options.
- "Sleaze Freeze" units move earlier to free up subsequent movement (but be aware of CC Reaction Fire, especially if there's a leader there).
- If the Defender holds his fire, continue to build a firegroup shots with low value units for the AFPh.
- **BEWARE MOVING INFANTRY INTO LOCATIONS THEY CAN'T ROUT FROM IF THEY BREAK.**
  - This can be hard to see when you first learn ASL.
  - To avoid this, always ask, "where does this unit rout to if it breaks?"

Lastly, when moving, don't overlook opportunities to take VC Locations "on the march". You make these captures when there are no enemy units to oppose the VC you're achieving. Such captures are far easier than having to capture them when opposed by enemy forces and can slow the clock's progress (you remember the clock ticking in the back of your mind, right?).

### Deployment To Increase Movement (CX/Transfer Games)

A4 MF/PP CHART												
Unit(s)*	IPC†	0pp	1pp	2pp	3pp	4pp	5pp	6pp	7pp	8pp	9pp	10pp
SMC	[1]	6	6	5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
CX SMC	[0]	8/7	7/6	6/5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
SMC w/SMC	[2]	6	6	6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
MMC	[3]	4	4	4	4	3	2	1	0	0	0	0
CX MMC	[2]	6/5	6/5	6/5	5/4	4/3	3/2	2/1	1/0	0	0	0
MMC w/Hero	[4]	4	4	4	4	4	3	2	1	0	0	0
CX MMC w/Hero	[3]	6/5	6/5	6/5	6/5	5/4	4/3	3/2	2/1	1/0	0	0
MMC w/Leader	[4]	6	6	6	6	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
CX MMC w/Leader	[3]	6/6	6/6	6/6	6/6	6/6	6/5	5/4	4/3	3/2	2/1	1/0
CX MMC w/CX Leader	[2]	8/7	8/7	8/7	7/6	6/5	5/4	4/3	3/2	2/1	1/0	0

\* First listed unit possesses *all* PP.  
† [#] is combined IPC (SMC + MMC)  
Cross-referenced # is MF for that stack.  
## First number represents MF if designated unit(s) declare(s) Double Time at *beginning* of that unit(s) move;  
Second number if Double Time declared *during* that unit(s) move.  
Subtract one MF from all cases for Inexperienced penalties (A19.31).

By deploying the squad into two half squads you open chances for increased movement. The first half squad possessing the 5PP weapon Double Times. The leader carries one PP leaving 4PP for the HS. Looking at the 4PP column, we see a CX'd half squad carrying 4 PP has 6 MFs. In the APH, the CX unit transfers the 5PP SW to the non-CX'd unit which can fire the SW without CX penalties.

In the next Attacking Player turn, the first unit loses its CX, the unit possessing the 5 PP SW declares Double Time, and the unit possessing the 5 PP SW has 6 MFs again.

### Other Random Considerations For The Movement Phase

- Berserk units move first.
  - I try to stack Berserk units on top so the orange counter is visible.
  - The red berserk counters available from some TPP are really helpful here too.

- Know how to limit enemy fire opportunities.
  - Even if they can see it, they can't shoot it if units restrict their fire.
  - This is key to freeing up other units to maneuver.
- Cut rout paths.
  - Failure to rout is the greatest killer in ASL.
- Don't be afraid to take some risks—Risk an Original DR 4 (This is from Bob Bendis ☞).
- Don't fear HIP.
- Covering fire—A.K.A. Opportunity Fire.
- Have a plan to overcome or bypass Obstacles.
  - Go around them?
  - Breach them?
- Reinforce success.
  - Why keep banging your head against a wall.
  - Just make sure the exploitation can lead to victory.
- Don't be overly afraid of Residual FP.
  - But have a plan when you break.
  - Don't forget you get the TEM versus RFP when by passing terrain.
  - Do respect minus DRMs.
  - Move into Residual FP one unit at a time.
- Consider the various ways for reconnaissance.
  - Bump scouting.
  - Search.
  - Drawing fire.
- Recover SW.
- May attempt to clear Flame.
- Declare Clearance attempts here.
  - Resolved in CPh.
  - Make sure you look up the rules if you plan on clearing Obstacles.
- Declare Search and resolve as part of MPh.
  - Casualties from searching occur here too.
- Infantry Smoke can be used to cover an AFV's retreat too!
  - Use Infantry movement to place Smoke Grenades between the firer and the target AFV.
  - Every grenade placed is a +2 DRM in the MPh; three grenades block LOS.

### **Defensive Fire Phase (in your opponent's Player Turn):**



As I said above, the key to a good Defensive Fire Phase as the Attacker is to plan for it during the previous MPH. A good Attacker will seek to limit or eliminate the Defender's ability to reinforce laterally. To do this, the Attacker must anticipate how the Defender might move his units around and try to interdict that movement.

A good Attacker will try to limit the Defender's ability to skulk. This entails envisioning where the Defender's units might skulk to and then maneuvering to bring those locations under fire, especially if they are open ground. There are at least two benefits to cutting off skulking opportunities:

- If the Defender can't skulk, he will either withdraw to a new line or fire from where his units are.
  - Your superior numbers at the point of attack should count more if he elects to fire.
- If the Defender withdraws, his path to the next line will probably include the position he was seeking to skulk into.

In either case, these outcomes are a product of a well-executed MPH.

### **Thinking About Defensive Fire – Defensive Fire In Place Of Prep Fire**

Bob Bendis—a top American ASL player—once told me to think of my Attacking Defensive Fire Phase as Prep Fire for my upcoming turn. At first, this advice puzzled me. After thinking about it, I saw just how right he was. Systemically, the Attacker gets a Defensive Fire Phase followed by a Prep Fire Phase. Anything broken or pinned as part of the

Defensive Fire Phase is not likely to Rally in the upcoming Rally Phase as it will be under DM. Even if it is rallied, it is not likely to be in the best position to stop forward movement on this turn. Furthermore, such units are not likely to be in a strong position for the upcoming Defending player's turn and will have to move to improve their position.

The more I thought about it and the more I played ASL, the more I came to see how powerful this line of thinking is. I now fired a lot less in Prep Fire and favored maneuver. My attacks became more aggressive. I worked harder to get into position to stop skulking. My opponent's withdrawals frequently came under attack as I thought ahead. I was taking more shots in the Advancing Fire Phase.

Just like units broken in Defensive Fire, units broken in the AFPh are likely not going to be in strong positions or properly deployed to face an attack in your next MPH. If you don't understand why, think about it some. At the end of your turn, such units will rout. They will rout to get out of LOS so they can't be put under DM.

This means they can't move or advance and may still be in big stacks. In your Player Turn, they will probably recover. Those units won't be concealed or in a position to interdict your upcoming movement. These units will have to move in the Defender's next turn and aggressive movement can cut off his escape path and allow you to overwhelm this weakened position through fire and maneuver.

Seriously, if you take only one thing from this whole article, I beg you to sit down and think about this concept and how it can alter the way you approach the game. Thanks for the insight, Bob.

If the Defender has broken units in LOS, prioritize them if there is a leader with them or a leader who can Advance back to them in the APH. It makes no sense to DM those units and let them freely rout to a leader when they can't Self-Rally in your upcoming turn. You can easily handle these units through maneuver and putting them into a Surrender or failure to rout situation.

Unlike Prep Fire, shooting will not limit your unit's ability to move. Take as many shots as you can. As I noted above, don't let the SAN number slow you down too much.

### Other Random Considerations For The Defensive Fire Phase

- Encircle if you can.
  - Double MFs to leave the Location, and may cause the units to become CXed.
  - Lowers morale by one.
  - +1 DRM to fire out therefrom.
  - Locations are Encircled, not units.

If your units Advance into an Encircled Location, they become Encircled once covered with a Melee counter no matter who did the Encircling.
- Encircled units Adjacent to a KEU don't rout, they Surrender.
  - Don't forget upper-level Encirclement.
- Don't forget Snap Shots.
  - A 2 flat Snap Shot is better than a 4 +2 shot at the destination.
  - It's cheesy and some tournaments ban it, but a wall doesn't block LOS to its own Location so you can Snap Shot a unit falling back behind a wall.
  - This can be powerful if the Defender seeks to skulk behind a wall.
- The Defender may designate new Spotters for mortars, if otherwise eligible.
- Make Clearance DRs in the Defensive Fire Phase.
  - There are some exceptions.
  - Make sure you read or know the Clearance rules if you plan on clearing an Obstacle.

- Disassemble or reassemble SW if you plan on moving in the MPH.
  - This is especially true for 5PP SW.
  - Alternatively, you can deploy a possessing squad and play CX/transfer games.

### **Advancing Fire Phase:**

Just as with Defensive Fire, an effective AFPh is determined by the Attacker's MPH. Through maneuver, seek to apply pressure on key points of the defense holding you back from victory. Where possible, seek to Encircle key enemy positions. Almost as important, seek to be in position to Interdict broken units in "must-rout" situations. Keep in mind units with positive DRMs (CX, Hindrance, etc.) cannot Interdict. Also, do not fire on units which will Surrender or be eliminated for failure to rout. Why give them a chance to return with a Heat of Battle DR?

Do not fire on broken units adjacent to Concealed attacking units. Concealed units do not place the broken units under DM. Nor do they allow them to rout away. Given the favorable ambush modifiers and defending as broken units in CC, the Attacker is likely to eliminate the broken units and be able to Infiltrate. Even if Melee forms, Melee will compel the broken units to Withdraw in the Defender's Player Turn. Even if the broken unit somehow survives Withdrawal, it won't be able to rally and attacking units will be free to fire and maneuver as needed in the next Attacking Player Turn.

It is important to understand how Assault Fireworks. It plays a significant role in some attacking formations. To qualify for Assault Fire, the shot must be within Normal Range. The worst an Assault Fire shot can be is 2. No matter how small the fractional firepower remaining is, it will round up to 1 and add 1 more for a final 2 fire power shot. Assault Fire from adjacent Locations will usually add 1 to the printed firepower. Multi-hex fire groups of Assault Fire-capable units can get to quite large columns, so plan your shots accordingly.

Unlike Prep Fire, any unit firing in AFPh can still Advance in the Advance Phase. There is little, to no, reason not to fire if the shot has even a marginal chance of success. Take important shots first to prevent a SAN from ruining those shots. Remember, take Encircling shots in sequence and use the largest firepower shot you can to complete the Encirclement.

You may fire White Phosphorus from Ordnance Weapons in the AFPh. It must still be the FIRST shot taken as part of the AFPh and it places Dispersed WP. Such WP can still generate a morale check if placed in a unit's Location. Even Dispersed, it creates Hindrances which might provide cover for routing units that might otherwise Surrender.

You remembered to move a "Rally Machine" to support the broken units, right?

## Other Random Considerations For The Advancing Fire Phase

- Don't forget Flame and Blaze spreading.
- SMOKE flips again if Gusts are in effect this Player Turn.
- SMOKE Drifts downwind.
  - This happens before AFPh shots take place.
  - Drifting SMOKE uses "grey" counters.
- Crews may Limber and Unlimber Guns as required.
- If Case J theoretically applied to a Stopped AFV or Wreck, it doesn't count as a Hindrance until AFTER the AFPh.

## Rout Phase:

As has been suggested so many times in this article, success in the Rout Phase comes down to properly executing the MPh. As forces maneuver into harm's way, the Attacker must pay attention to where those troops are going to rout to. Knowing where broken units are bound for, there should be a leader there for the broken unit to rout to. The rout phase should not come as a surprise. If you find your units mostly conducting Self-Rally attempts or leaders scrambling all over to Rally units back into the attack, start examining how you execute your attacks and how your leaders are moving. Many players see a leader and think it should lead the attack from the front and then wonder why their attack lost its momentum. If your attack has left behind a string of still-broken units, perhaps it's time to reassess how you use leaders.

Pay particular attention to units moving next to enemy units when on the attack. If these units do not have a rout path free from Interdiction, they are in danger of surrendering. These units should move either first, so the attacker can create cover for them to rout away if needed, or last after drawing off as much firepower as you can to increase the survivability of these units. If you find yourself losing units for failure to rout as the attacker, you need to improve this portion of your game. The Attacker should be causing failure to rout, not losing units to failure to rout.

## Other Random Considerations For The Rout Phase

- The Attacker isn't likely to Voluntarily Break in his Player Turn.
  - It can be a sneaky way to "double move" by routing forward.
- Disrupted units Surrender to ADJACENT, Good Order Cavalry/Infantry.
- Eliminate units remaining in a Blaze Location.
- This is a good time to Voluntarily Break if you need to.
- Surrendering units subject to Interrogation if Interrogation is in play.

- **Just because a unit is broken, doesn't mean it can't be useful.**
  - Enemy units can't enter a broken unit's Location unless the broken unit is Disrupted.
  - This can deny terrain to enemy units.
  - Broken units can deny rout paths.
    - Units can't rout towards KEU, even if it is broken.
    - The Phasing player routs first so this can be taken advantage of.
  - Broken units can still inflict DM on enemy broken units.
    - Units can't rout towards a KEU, but if the broken unit begins the RPh out of LOS...
    - Also a good candidate for Voluntary Breaking.

### Advance Phase:

At this point, all the movement is done. Routing is sorted out. What remains are small micro-adjustments to the line. Any Good Order, un-Pinned unit of the phasing player may move up to one Location. There are some situations which will Counter Exhaust (CX) the unit so pay careful attention, also Berserk units cannot advance.

As a part of this phase, SW/Guns/Prisoners may be transferred between units. The transfers will inherit the Concealment status of its new possessors. Units accepting Prisoners may deploy even if not otherwise allowed to deploy.

Deciding to enter or avoid Close Combat is the most fateful decision made in this phase. When deciding, consider Ambush drms, CC DRMs, and CC attack odds. Where possible, don't enter into CC unless at least one of these favors your side, preferably all three.

As noted in the AFPh section, advancing Concealed units into CC with broken units can be very profitable. Don't hesitate to do this.

If you want to do an in-depth study of CC odds, I recommend Bruno Nitrosso's article *THE CLOSE COMBAT SIMULATOR – What To Expect When You're ... Close Combating!* in [ASL Journal 10](#). *The Fine Art of Bushwhackin'* by Dave Ollie in [ASL Journal 4](#) is a great article on covering the odds of Ambushing in CC.

### Other Random Considerations For The Advance Phase

- Hindrances and other positive DRM allow units to Advance into otherwise open ground and remain Concealed.
- Transfer SW/Guns/Prisoners as needed.
- Japanese MMC Adjacent to an AFV may attempt Tank-Hunter-Hero creation.



- Don't forget about the Defender's skulking options.
  - It's too late to think about them in Defensive First Fire.
- If you think the Defender will fall back to his next defensive line, try to put those paths under fire.
  - Remember the power of breaking units in Defensive Fire.
- Don't forget to cut off or impede laterally reinforcing units.
  - As the attacker, you've worked hard to this point to achieve local force superiority. Don't let the Defender even the odds back out.

### Close Combat:

Close Combat is a fickle mistress. It gambles everything on a single throw of the dice (even more so if the CC is HtH). Should you decide to venture into CC, do what you can to make sure the Ambush drms and CC odds are as much in your favor as you can. AFVs "Sleaze Freezing" a position adds a +2 Ambush drm. If Buttoned Up, they add another +1

Ambush drm. Worse yet, if you cannot get Ambush (and you most likely won't), the CC is Sequential with the non-AFV player going first. Should the Defender opt to attack the AFV, your units count as covering Infantry. If the Defender opts to attack your Infantry, a lucky DR could wipe them all out before they get a chance to attack. Even if your AFV subsequently eliminates the Defender, the Defender would likely keep Control, or regain Control when the AFV moves away.

If the Attacker achieves Ambush, give careful consideration to leaving without attacking. If Infiltration allows the Attacker to fulfill some VC, then Infiltration is likely the best choice. Otherwise, the unit can remain and attack. If the Attacker eliminates the enemy, it can Infiltrate after the attack. If the Attacker cannot eliminate the enemy, the unit can Infiltrate if it survives the Defender's attack.

Don't rule out CC. If there are no other options and time is running short, it may be the best possible play. Just know you can do EVERYTHING correctly and still come out worse for wear. A lucky or unlucky DR can completely wreck everything.

## CC Cruelty – Examples From Play

I was at Winter Offensive one year watching Bill Cirillo play. I don't recall who his opponent was or what they were playing. What I do recall is Bill was winning the scenario on the last turn and his opponent opted to Advance into CC. Bill could afford to lose 2 CVP and still win the game and had a full squad in CC. In CC, Bill's opponent rolled a 1,2 to eliminate Bill's squad. Bill attacked back and rolled a 1,1 for Leader Creation. The subsequent dr created an 8-0—AKA 1 CVP. Sadly, the 1,2 was low enough to eliminate the original squad and the new 8-0 even with recalculated odds. The 8-0 came into existence only long enough for Bill to lose on the last DR. From a risk perspective, the proper play for Bill was not to attack back. He and I both know that now. I dare say he didn't then. I know I didn't.

[ **Editor's Note:** Since his article was originally published, several readers have pointed out this next example is wrong. Not only is CC a cruel mistress, not knowing the rules is even crueler. Per A10.2, there is no LLMC/LLTC when in CC.] I once entered CC with a BU, Shocked AFV. My units included a 9-2 and 5-4-8 squad. I attacked with a CCV of 6 and a -4 DRM (Immobilized, no Manned Usable MG, -2 leader). I rolled a 6,6 on my attack, resulting in Crew Small Arms. Even though the AFV had no usable CCV, my units suffered Casualty Reduction. Random Selection selected the 9-2 and eliminated the leader on the Wound Severity dr. The 5-4-8 subsequently broke on the 2MC. The AFV drove off in its Player Turn. CC is cruel. There are no guarantees on a single throw of the dice.

## Conclusion



Attacking in ASL is the most difficult task. When properly designed, a scenario will put pressure on the Attacker to make correct and timely decisions. A correct decision made in the wrong time or place is just another bad decision. Getting all this right when the pressure is on to fabricate a victory is difficult. Remember, the Defender can just sit there and laze his way to victory. Sadly, as the Attacker, you cannot.

Still, within this burden lies the nuggets for victory. The Attacker decides when and where the attack takes place and can bring the full weight of his OB onto a very narrow front, overwhelming the Defender's ability to hold back the onslaught. Properly orchestrated, the Attacker can also prevent the Defender from laterally reinforcing the point of attack, keeping him from ever entering the game. For all the pressure the scenario designer places on you, you can repay the Defender tenfold if you devise a proper plan.

It is in this planning that I hope this article has helped. As I said at the top, I doubt many will consider this the definitive “How to Attack in ASL” article. There are many who are far more qualified to do this than I am, and I hope they add to this discussion. All I can do is the best I can, and hope that some players find this remotely useful. ASL is a tough game to learn. It is a tougher game to learn how to attack properly. I hope this flattens the learning curve. – Jim

**Editor’s Note:** At last, we have arrived at the end. If you hung in there and read all 70+ pages of this article, I applaud your persistence and endurance. I also hope you can see the value of the methodology I have laid out here. It all goes back to the foundation, my four ASL Maxims: VC, Terrain, Time, and Order of Battle. Analyzing the effect of these on your upcoming conflict should allow you to plan with a reasonable chance of success.

Still, there are other considerations that you learn as a player the more experience you gain. No plan survives first contact. How you adapt your plan in the face of your opponent’s actions and the vagaries of the dice will also play a role. The better you can adapt on the fly, the more success you will have.

Tactics are another aspect of winning. Tactics can be defined as *“the art or skill of employing available means to accomplish an end”*. This can seem straightforward at first blush. That word “employing” though has a deeper connotation than it may seem at first. To properly “employ” a unit, you as a player must know what rules covers the usage of that unit. If there is a gap in your understanding, there is a tool missing from your box. If your opponent knows it and employs it, it will come as a surprise to you and be impossible to defend against and adapt to.

This learning comes through play. You can read the rulebook and begin to know the rules, but most people won’t be able to identify all the subtleties they imply. I know I wasn’t. Playing against another person who is trying to win can expose you to options you hadn’t considered. Still, playing inside a small group of people tends to create an isolated understanding of the game. Small groups tend to learn the game and tactics together. They tend to make the same mistakes which become ingrained into their group. The play can be quite competitive without ever exploring the depth of the rules.

In my opinion, to get a broad understanding of the rules, it helps to play very widely. Go to tournaments and be exposed to players from all over the world. See what rules and contributions they bring to the play. They will likely have more rules and tactics depth in some areas and less in others. Try to understand what they are doing and adapt what they bring to your own style. Don’t hesitate to ask people to show you the rules as they go about something you don’t understand.

Take the time after the game to think about it and how you might apply it in your play going forward. Think about how you might defend against such moves in the future. This is how you grow in ASL. Learning is an



active process. You must put in the time to become a good player. Maybe that isn't what you want, and that's OK. But if your goal is to be the best ASL player you can be, then it takes work and playing widely. The best ASL players I know, are all rules gurus, play in tournaments routinely, play often, and know how to apply the rules in any situation. They just have more tools than you. Learn from them when you can. Best of luck on your ASL growth. It can be a very rewarding hobby.