

Red Banner

A quarterly fanzine for the Advanced Squad Leader (ASL) board game
By the DC Conscripts ASL Club



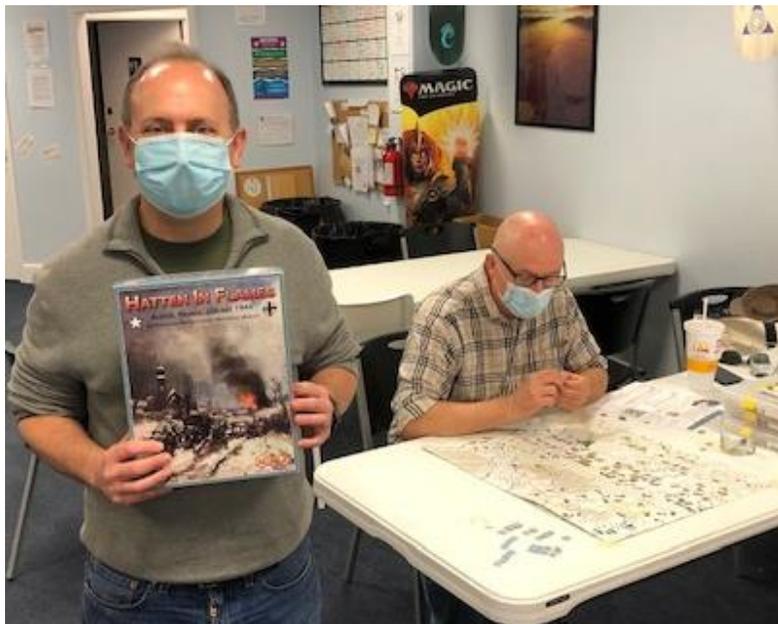
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Commissar's Call: *Masked ASL (MASL)*



In a fitting tribute to the Motherland, our conscripts modeled good comradeship when they reconvened for “Masked” Advanced Squad Leader (MASL) on October 31. How clever that our brothers observed the Halloween tradition (an esoteric American holiday polluted by both pre and post Christian religiosity) and good public health at the same time. Indeed, the Commissar is proud to see his charges looking out for each other unlike the Fascists who think only of themselves.





Conscripts' Chatter: *Simulating the Polish-Soviet War*



There's talk of making some scenarios to cover the Polish-Soviet war of 1919/20. This could work. Gird yourself for more playtesting.

Amazing ASL Lore: *Wirbelwind of Wonder*

One of our comrades relayed the following tale from a game among the bourgeoisie.

The defending Germans had a well-positioned Wirbelwind with a good field of fire guarding a key building. But eager to tempt fate, that machine started its engine and drove headlong into the enemy! The Russians responded with five defensive fire shots as follows: 16+2, 8+2, 8+1, 12 flat, and 6 flat; all failed! Unscathed, the mighty AA AFV pulled alongside its prey, a Russian 10-2 leader with 4-5-8 toting an LMG, and fired with a dice roll of 3 during Advance Fire to vaporize those petulant Russians. Talk about pushing the envelope.

New Article: *Gaming WWI with ASL Rules*

As a student of The Great War who has read a mile-high stack of history and published several games on the topic I felt called to comment on recent efforts to portray WWI actions with ASL rules. First, let's applaud the entrepreneurial creativity of all involved. Bravo for expanding our horizons. Next, we should acknowledge that one can model just about anything with something else. For example, I can use my hands to "model" a variety of animals as shadow puppets. So, we can't deny that modeling WWI with a modified WWII rules set is possible. The real question is, "How accurately and extensively does the model represent the genuine article?"

Unfortunately, ASL rules are hard pressed to accurately and extensively model the First World War since they are the sum of all the lessons learned in that earlier conflict. Using ASL rules for WWI is "cheating history" by giving cardboard soldiers the benefit of future knowledge. That's because the "corrections" for WWI mistakes are "baked in" to the ASL rules. The very existence of squads, light machine guns, and 8-1 leaders are a consequence of WWI. It's in the game's name "Squad Leader." Small unit leadership, a fundamental building block of success in WWII and hence the game's name, was not "a thing" in WWI. Yes, WWI armies had tactical units, but not until the end of the war, did they even try to operate as squads. For most of the war, WWI armies did not deliberately operate in units smaller than platoons, and even those were used in extremis; companies were the default tactical units. The platoons sought to operate as components of their company and exercised great caution when presented with the prospect of independent action. This was in contrast to WWII platoons which didn't hesitate to break down into squads for independent action. The WWI paradigm had tactical units looking up for orders rather than out for opportunities.

Still, if you must, you can put lipstick on this pig and use ASL to simulate WWI battles. If you choose that path, I recommend using existing rules in new ways rather than exercising the usual ASL penchant for creating new rules since the rule book is too big already. The trick is to interpret existing rules in ways that incentivize WWI tactics. In that regard, we have several challenges to address including: the role of leaders, which squads to use, and how to encourage platoon-oriented fire and movement, among others.

Leaders: As already mentioned, small unit leadership as we know it today emerged during WWI as armies shifted their top down paradigm in response to battlefield realities. Therefore, any portrayal of WWI with ASL rules should prohibit leaders from imparting their 2 MF bonus to accompanying squads and prohibit the application of leadership modifiers to fire attacks until 1917. In all other respects, WWI leaders could function according to the usual ASL rules.

Squads: Most squads should have a firepower factor of 3 to account for the absence of inherent light machine guns until 1917. Designers could make exceptions for noted marksmen such as the British Expeditionary Force and Austrian Innsbruck Corps of 1914 who might have FP 4. For lack of hand grenades, no squad should get triple or pointblank fire multiples until 1917. Seven morale should be the norm. Therefore, Axis Minor squads from ASL could represent most WWI nationalities until 1917 when the bulk of each nation's inventory would then be represented by its usual second line squads from the ASL counter mix. The pervasive demoralization that had gripped most WWI armies by 1917 along with the fragility of light machine guns of the day makes the ASL 2nd line squad an ideal exemplar of troops at that time.

DO NOT use half squads in a WWI context; interpret all casualty reduction and K results as 1KIA and prohibit deployment. On a related note, all support weapons except light machine guns are crew served; you will need and use infantry crews.

Platoons: You don't need more rules to incentivize platoon operations. The following "tweaks" should do it. DO NOT use the incremental infantry firepower table since its 3-column would invite single squad shots. On the other hand, the absence of a 3-column on the standard firepower table encourages players to form their 3-factor squads into fire groups to score a waste-free 6, less wasteful 9, or spot on 12. All of that requires units to stack or be adjacent for a platoon-like formation. In conjunction with that, squads firing as part of a fire group that includes at least one other squad should be immune to cowering; that provides further incentive to "bunch up." For movement, any squad that starts its move while in the same hex as or adjacent to another same nationality squad gains a 1 MP bonus usable at any point in its move. That simple rule of thumb incentivizes bunching without a pile of arcane platoon movement rules. Note, the last squad to move will be disadvantaged if all the others move two hexes or more. Therefore, the player has to decide to slow down the penultimate squad, to remain adjacent, or play catch up with the last squad. Either way, the group of squads in question focuses on staying together (as a platoon) to avail the benefits of starting adjacent in the future.

Human Wave: All nationalities except the U.S. and Japan can use human wave through 1916. The Japanese actually avoided those tactics and were very casualty conscious because they wanted to demonstrate that empire building was worth the cost! By the time the U.S. entered the war those tactics had been discredited.

Ordnance: The ASL counter mix already includes a variety of WWI-era guns; use them with all the usual rules and these adjustments. No white phosphorus. In 1914, all ordnance has AP 5, HE 7, and a new ammo type "shrapnel" without a depletion number. Shrapnel enables a gun to use the IFT column one to the right (higher) than usual, but also doubles all TEM! Therefore, a 75mm gun firing shrapnel at a target in a stone building would use the 16 FP column, but also incur a +6 TEM. Shrapnel works best against exposed targets in the open.

Vehicles: The ASL counter mix already includes a variety of WWI-era vehicles; use them with all the usual rules.

Offboard Artillery: No radios, some phones, and some runners as defined by the scenario. Phones enable the usual OBA rules. If a SSR indicates a side has a runner, then any leader can function as spotter, but once determined the spotter remains the same for the rest of the scenario. For runner mode, assume "radio contact and maintenance" are automatic, but the attacker cannot even try to place a spotting round unless he first rolls a 1 on one die, after which the usual accuracy process kicks in. Starting in 1916, OBA can fire gas; just use white phosphorus counters with all the usual rules except these twists. Unlike WP MC, a gas-induced MC does NOT get the benefit of terrain modifiers; it's just a straight NMC. Gas rises only through level 1. In 1915, gas was delivered via pipes and is therefore best simulated by requiring all targeted units to just take a pre-game NMC with all the usual consequences and then assume heavy mist (+1 LVH at 0-6 hexes, +2 LVH at 7-12 hexes, etc.) covers the battlefield for the remainder of the scenario.

Miscellaneous Chrome: Helmets and Entrenching

Apply the following rules in the years indicated. Thousands of avoidable head injuries occurred in 1914 for lack of helmets. Therefore, in 1914 any non-German unit that fails a pin check with doubles is in fact broken! The French had a pronounced aversion to digging in 1914 and therefore suffer a +1 penalty to all entrenching attempts that year.

Could one use ASL to simulate the Polish-Soviet War? Of course, and with some satisfaction since it was after WWI and one of the first conflicts to apply the lessons of the Great War as reflected in the ASL rules.