

An ASLSK Tutorial (Part 1)

Squads, Leaders, Basic Sequence of Play

There have been numerous requests for a basic, step-by-step tutorial to help beginners figure out how to play the ASL Starter Kits when there is no experienced player available to teach them, so I thought I'd give it a try. This series of tutorials is aimed specifically at those players who, having read (or having attempted to read) the ASLSK rulebook, are left clueless as to how the game actually works. Players who have successfully completed one or more ASLSK scenarios are, of course, also welcome, but I'm not sure how much benefit this will be to them. This will be ASL on a VERY basic level, so it may be terribly boring to anyone who actually knows how to play.

Some notes before we begin:

* This tutorial does not replace the rulebook. I will show you how the rules are used during a game, but you will still need to read the rules to fully understand what all they allow you to do.

* When I first posted this article, no illustrations were included. However, given that there are people reading this tutorial to learn about the ASLSK series before they even purchase a copy of the game, and that individual Starter Kit titles occasionally go out-of-stock for months at a time and thus can be temporarily unavailable to a new player, it's clear that including illustrations would greatly increase the usefulness of this article.

Although illustrations are now included, I still strongly recommend that you get out your boards and counters and follow along that way, if at all possible, because the best way to learn from this tutorial is to actually push the counters around on the map. It's all too easy to simply glance at an illustration without understanding the full implications of what it is showing.

* I intend to provide a lot of background information concerning the rules and components of ASL. For example, to simply point out that an American rifle squad has higher firepower and lower morale than the corresponding German rifle squad is not, I think, very helpful to a beginner. I'd rather take time to explain WHY these squads differ from each other – by explaining what the various numbers represent – because I think it will make more sense when the beginner then sees these squads in action. The game is easier to understand if you can visualize what is occurring on the imaginary battlefield.

In this first installment, I will review the basic units of the game: squads and leaders. After explaining what these units represent, and how they differ from each other, I will then use a simple tactical situation to illustrate the basic sequence of play in action. Squads and leaders are described in rules 1.2.1, 1.2.2, and 1.2.3.

The Squads of ASL

A German 1st Line rifle squad has the following values printed on the front of the counter: 4(1)-6-7. These are, from left to right, Firepower (FP), Smoke Exponent, Range, and Morale Level. A squad typically represents ten soldiers, although this will vary somewhat depending upon nationality and date.

A squad's FP is primarily based upon its weaponry. In the case of the German 1st Line squad, this would be a light machine gun with a two-man crew, six riflemen with bolt-action rifles, and a sergeant and a corporal who could be armed with either rifles or submachine guns.

To better understand FP, compare a German Elite rifle squad: 4(2)-6-8, to a German Conscript rifle squad: 4-3-6. The elite squad is a highly trained, highly motivated unit, while the conscript squad is either a poorly trained unit, or a unit that has suffered casualties to its key personnel. But both squads have the same exact FP... because they have the same equipment.

A squad's range, however, is based on both equipment and training. A German 1st Line squad has the same range as a German Elite squad, 6 hexes, so both squads are capable of effective fire at long range. But the German Conscript squad only has a range of 3 hexes; it has the same basic weapons as the other two squads, but it does not have the coordination (again due to lack of training or casualties to key personnel) to fire effectively at the same range as the better squads.

A Russian 5-2-7 squad has a range of only 2 hexes because it is equipped with submachine guns, which have a much shorter range than rifles. An American paratrooper squad, 7(3)-4-7, uses a mixture of carbines and submachine guns, so it gets an intermediate range of 4 hexes. The presence of submachine guns boosts the FP of both of these squads as compared to the equivalent rifle squads of those nations.

A squad's Morale Level is probably the single most important number in the game... it is the key to what makes ASL work. This number represents a unit's ability withstand being attacked. The lower the Morale Level, the more likely it is that an attack will cause that unit to break. Broken units (which are flipped over to display their broken side) cannot attack, and move only according to the Rout rules. A German 1st Line squad has a Morale of 7, which is average. A Morale Level of 8 is excellent, and a Morale Level of 6 is poor.

Which brings us to the American 1st Line rifle squad: 6(3)-6-6. A Morale Level of 6. So... are the Americans cowards? poorly trained? or what?!

The American Morale Level of 6 represents the tendency of American soldiers to dive into cover when they are fired upon, as opposed to German, British, and Russian soldiers, who would be more likely to return fire when fired upon.

This is not as much of a disadvantage to the Americans as you might think. If you compare the American and German 1st Line squads, the Americans are more likely to break when fired upon (Morale 6 vs 7); but flip these squads over to their broken sides and look at the difference. The broken side of a squad's counter has only one combat value: that squad's broken Morale Level. The American broken Morale is 8, while the German broken Morale is 7... the higher number is better, so the Americans will rally much more easily than the Germans.

What's happening here is this: when an American squad fails a Morale Check and breaks, it likely hasn't really panicked... the troops are simply keeping their heads down. This makes it relatively easy for a leader to rally them and get them back into the fight. A German squad is less likely to break, but when it does break it really is panicked, and it will be more difficult for a leader to rally them from a panicked state.

An American rifle squad would normally have one soldier using a Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR), which does not quite qualify as a true light machine gun and so never appears as a separate support weapon counter, seven soldiers with M1 Garand semi-automatic rifles, and a sergeant and a corporal armed with either M1s or submachine guns. The American FP advantage over similar German, British, and Russian rifle squads comes from the semi-automatic rifles, which can fire far faster than any bolt-action rifle.

The Leaders of ASL

A leader counter has two values printed on it: the leader's Morale Level, and his Leadership Modifier. A 9-1 leader, for example, has a Morale of 9, and a Leadership Modifier of -1 (on the leader counters, the connecting hyphen between the two values is always read as a minus sign).

Leaders can range in value from the inept 6+1 to the incredible 10-3, although there are no 10-3's included in ASLSK #1. Leaders are your most important units, and the winner of an ASL/ASLSK scenario is often the player who makes the most effective use of his leaders.

Leaders with negative Leadership Modifiers are almost always found on the front lines in the thick of the fighting. Their Leadership Modifier makes the attack of any squads they are stacked with far more effective, and it also assists those squads in resisting enemy attacks.

Leaders with a Leadership Modifier of zero give little benefit in actual fighting, so they are often used behind the front lines to rally broken troops.

The 6+1 leaders, whose positive Leadership Modifier actually makes any squads stacked with them LESS effective and MORE vulnerable than they would be on their own, are best kept well away from the enemy. They can be used to rally broken troops, although not as effectively as the other leaders. The one thing they can do just as well as any other leader is add additional Movement Factors (MF) to any squads stacked with them.

The 6+1 leaders do not normally represent actual combat leaders. Instead, they often represent marginal leaders such as a poorly trained officer with no actual combat experience (which you might find in a true Conscript unit), or a high-level staff officer (one who fights by looking at a map and issuing orders to the actual combat troops) who suddenly finds himself caught up in a battle situation. This is why most 6+1 leaders carry the rank of Colonel. Occasionally, however, a 6+1 will actually represent an incompetent combat leader.

Leadership is abstracted in ASL. If you actually included a counter for every sergeant and corporal present, you would have far more leaders than squads. The leaders that are present in every squad are assumed to be doing their job competently, so they are factored into the squad's ratings and do not appear as separate leader counters. The leaders that do appear in counter form are the few that perform above average, and who thus might be able to influence the course of the battle. In other words, they are the leaders who make a difference.

The number of leaders that appear for a country in an ASL/ASLSK scenario is based upon how well the tactical leadership of that country performed in real life. The Germans usually get the greatest number of leaders, followed closely by the Americans and the British. The Russians and the Italians get relatively few leaders, reflecting the general poor quality of leadership in their armies. That is, the Russians and the Italians had just as many sergeants as anyone else, but they get fewer actual leaders in a scenario because their leadership was not as effective as that of other nations.

The Basic Sequence of Play

The ASLSK Sequence of Play – the list of phases and the order in which they occur – can be found on the Quick-Reference Data Card (QRDC). It can also be found in the rulebook in rule 3.0, which presents the basic rules for the phases in the order in which they occur.

In a full ASLSK turn, each player gets a player turn in which he is the ATTACKER and his opponent is the DEFENDER. The Sequence of Play is thus executed twice each turn, with the players switching the ATTACKER/DEFENDER roles the second time. The ATTACKER's units are eligible to move; the DEFENDER's units cannot move, but they may fire at attacking units that do move.

To demonstrate how the Sequence of Play works, I will use a tiny scenario that only lasts one player turn.

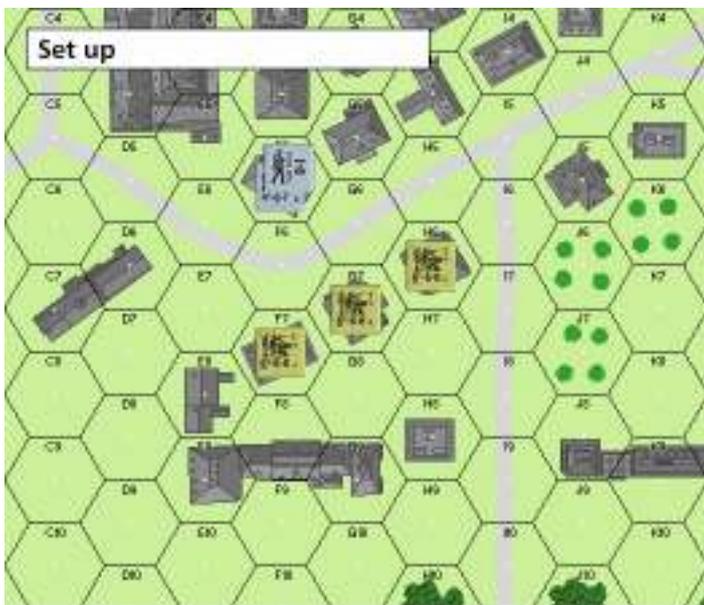
Place the following units on board z:

Hex zF5: German 4(1)-6-7, 9-1

Hex zF7: US 6(3)-6-6

Hex zG7: US 6(3)-6-6

Hex zH6: US 6(3)-6-6



The Americans will move first, so they are the ATTACKER and the Germans are the DEFENDER. Both sides have an Experience Level Rating (ELR) of 3 (rule 5.1).

To win this scenario, the Americans must capture hex zF5 by the end of their player turn, otherwise the Germans win. This means that the Americans must either eliminate the German squad and leader, or break them and force them to rout away, and then move an American squad into zF5 to gain control of the hex.

The Americans have a lot of advantages here: they outnumber the Germans 3 to 1, and have an 18 to 4 advantage in FP. The German advantages are the excellent defensive terrain of the stone building in zF5, the presence of the 9-1 leader, and the fact that the Americans only have one player turn in which to capture their objective.

The scenario begins with the Rally Phase.

RALLY PHASE (rule 3.1)

In the Rally Phase (RPh), both players may attempt to rally their broken units, and recover, transfer, or repair their support weapons.

Nothing usually happens in the very first Rally Phase of a scenario, because no combat or movement has yet occurred.

That is the case here: there is nothing to do, so we proceed to the next phase.

PREP FIRE PHASE (rule 3.2)

In the Prep Fire Phase (PFPh) the ATTACKER may fire at any enemy units that are in Line of Sight (LOS). Any unit that does fire may not move in the Movement Phase or fire in the Advancing Fire Phase.

What the American player would like to do here is fire all three squads at the Germans: 18 FP is a powerful attack. But the victory conditions will not allow this. They have to capture the German hex by the end of their turn, so at least one squad will have to move during the Movement Phase.

The American player decides to fire with the two squads in zF7 and zG7, leaving the squad in zH6 unfired and free to move later. So the American plan is to hammer the German position with as much firepower as possible, and then move up a squad to either occupy the empty hex if the Germans break and rout away, or else advance in and attempt to capture it via Close Combat.

Now, because the two firing squads are adjacent to each other, they can either combine to make a single 12 FP attack as a Fire Group (FG), or they can attack one at a time to make two separate 6 FP attacks. (If they were stacked together in the same hex, they would not be allowed to make two separate attacks on the same target but would have to form a FG and attack together; if they were in separate, non-adjacent hexes, they could not form a FG at all and would have to attack separately.)

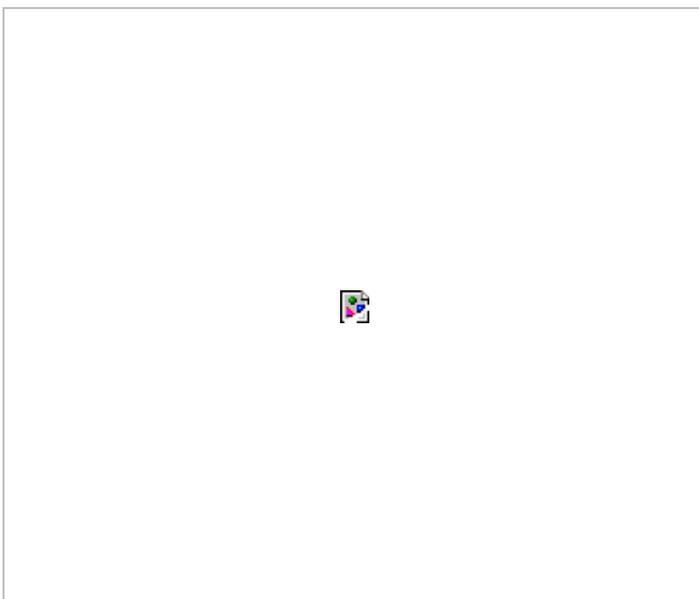
You will find a lot of different opinions as to whether it is better to make two weak attacks or one strong attack, but a general rule is that the better the defensive terrain the more need there is to make a single strong attack. If the Germans were in Open Ground (+0 TEM) or maybe even woods (+1 TEM), it is possible that two weak attacks might actually have a better overall chance of breaking them... but since they are in a stone building (+3 TEM) a combined attack is going to give the Americans their best chance.

So the two squads in zF7 and zG7 fire on the Germans with a 12 FP attack. The Terrain Effects Modifier (TEM) of a stone building is +3 (rule 1.1.2), so the attack is rolled on the Infantry Fire Table (IFT) as a 12/+3 (12 FP column, add 3 to the DR).

The American DR is 7, and +3 makes it 10. A 10 on the 12 FP column of the IFT is a PTC (Pin Task Check). Units that suffer a PTC must compare a DR to their Morale Level: if the DR is greater than their Morale, they are pinned, otherwise there is no effect.

The German 9-1 leader rolls his PTC first, because if it is successful he can then assist the German squad with its PTC. The leader rolls a DR 7, which is not greater than his Morale of 9, so he is not pinned. The German squad now rolls its PTC, with a -1 DRM from the Leadership Modifier of the 9-1 leader. The squad's DR is 7, and -1 makes it a 6, which is not greater than its Morale of 7, so it also passes the PTC and is not pinned.

The American attack ultimately has no effect, and both squads in zF7 and zG7 are marked with a Prep Fire counter to remind the players that these two squads cannot move or shoot again.



MOVEMENT PHASE (rule 3.3)

In the Movement Phase (MPH), the ATTACKER may move his units, and the DEFENDER may fire upon them as they move.

With the failure of their Prep Fire attack, the Americans are in big trouble... but they have no alternative other than to continue with their plan and hope for a miracle. The squad in zH6 will move into zG6. It must stop there, because you can never enter an enemy-occupied hex during the MPH, but if the squad survives the German defensive fire it will be able to enter zF5 in the Advance Phase and initiate Close Combat.

Squads have 4 movement factors (MF). It only costs 1 MF to enter zG6, so they will have plenty of MF to spare. Infantry also has the ability to use a special form of movement called Assault Movement, which can represent crawling or any other slow, careful movement that minimizes one's exposure to enemy fire. If a unit moves no more than one hex, and does not expend all of its MF, it can declare that it is using Assault Movement. Assault Movement provides an extra level of protection from enemy attacks by cancelling the First Fire Non-Assault Movement (FFNAM) DRM.

The squad in zH6 only needs to move one hex to become adjacent to the German hex, so the American player declares Assault Movement and spends 1 MF to enter zG6.

After every MF expenditure, the ATTACKER must pause to allow the DEFENDER the opportunity to use Defensive First Fire (rule 3.3.1). So, after the American squad enters zG6, the German player declares a Defensive First Fire shot on it. Defensive First Fire can only be used against a unit that expends MF, and only that unit (or stack, if several units are moving together) can be affected by that Defensive First Fire.

The German squad has a FP of 4, which is doubled to 8 because it is Point Blank Fire (PBF) against an adjacent target. FP is doubled in PBF for two reasons: (a) it is much easier to hit a nearby target; and (b) when firing into an adjacent hex the range is close enough that hand grenades can be used.

The German 9-1 leader will add a -1 DRM to the shot, but he has no FP of his own. Leaders, of course, did carry weapons and so are always considered "armed" but they have no effective FP except in Close Combat situations. At this scale, the FP of a single soldier is too small to justify giving him a FP point.

The American squad moved into Open Ground (a road hex) so there is no TEM. There are two other DRMs that can affect Defensive First Fire shots: First Fire Movement in Open Ground (FFMO), and First Fire Non-Assault Movement (FFNAM). A -1 DRM for FFMO will apply, but the use of Assault Movement cancels the FFNAM DRM.

The German defensive shot is thus 8/-2. The DR is 7, which is reduced to 5 by the -2 DRM. A 5 on the 8 FP column of the IFT is a 2MC. This requires the American squad to take a Morale Check (MC) with a +2 DRM.

The DR for the American MC is 7, which is increased to 9 by the +2 DRM. The American squad fails its MC and is broken, because 9 is greater than its Morale of 6. Flip the American squad over to its broken side and place a Desperation Morale (DM) counter on it. The American squad is not replaced by a lower quality 2nd Line squad, because 9 is not greater than its Morale, 6, plus its ELR, 3, (see rule 5.0).

Casualties in ASL are handled in a somewhat abstract manner, in order to avoid having to track casualties on a man by man basis:

- * A squad that breaks can be thought of as having suffered light casualties.
- * A squad that breaks and is replaced by a lower quality squad can be thought of as having suffered casualties among key personnel, causing it to become less effective.
- * A squad that is casualty reduced (K result) to a half squad (HS) has suffered heavy casualties.
- * A squad that is eliminated due to a KIA result has suffered catastrophic casualties.

A First Fire counter is placed on the German stack, and a Residual FP counter equal to one-half of the attack's IFT FP column (4 FP) is placed in the American squad's hex.



When a unit fires in ASL, it is, with only a few exceptions, actually firing throughout the entire player turn. If a unit moves into a hex and is fired upon, and then later in the turn another unit moves into the same hex, that second unit can possibly run into some of the bullets that are being aimed at the first unit. Residual FP is how ASL handles this possibility: if you move a unit into a hex containing a Residual FP counter, you will be attacked immediately by that Residual FP, prior to any separate attacks that might be aimed specifically at you.

The Germans cannot fire on the Americans again at this time, because the American squad only expended 1 MF, although if there were other German units with a LOS to the American squad, each of them could also make a single Defensive First Fire attack. Every time an attacking unit expends MF, it can possibly receive a Defensive First Fire attack from many different defending units... and if it expends more than 1 MF, each defending unit may be able to fire multiple times.

There are no more American units eligible to move, so the MPh is over. Remove the Residual FP counter.

DEFENSIVE FIRE PHASE (rule 3.4)

In the Defensive Fire Phase (DFPh), the DEFENDER's units may fire on the ATTACKER's units. Firing in the DFPh is normally conducted in the same way as firing in the PFPh, but there are some restrictions. If a unit begins the DFPh marked with a Final Fire counter, it may not fire at all; if it begins the DFPh marked with a First Fire counter, it may only fire at adjacent targets at one-half of its normal FP.

The German player decides to fire again at the adjacent broken American squad. The German squad's FP is 2 (one-half of 4), which is then doubled back to 4 by PBF. The 9-1 leader again adds a -1 DRM, but FFMO and FFNAM do not apply (they only apply during the MPh). The shot is a 4/-1, and the DR is 7, resulting in a NMC (Normal Morale Check).

The NMC DR is 7, which is less than the American squad's broken side Morale of 8, so the NMC is passed with no further ill effects to the American squad.

The First Fire counter on the German stack is flipped over to the Final Fire side, which signifies that they cannot fire any more during this DFPh. There are no other German units capable of firing, so the DFPh is over and the Final Fire counter is removed.



ADVANCING FIRE PHASE (rule 3.5)

In the Advancing Fire Phase (AFPh), any attacking units that did not fire in the PFP may fire with one-half of their FP, plus a 1 FP bonus if they are Assault Fire capable (i.e., their FP number is underlined).

Advancing Fire is less effective than Prep Fire, because units that are moving cannot fire with the volume or accuracy of units that do not move. Units that have the Assault Fire bonus are equipped with semi-automatic rifles and/or submachine guns – weapons that are easy to fire while moving – and have trained in using them in that manner.

The two unbroken American units are marked with Prep Fire counters, so no Advancing Fire is possible at this time. The AFPh ends, and the Prep Fire counters are removed.

ROUT PHASE (rule 3.6)

In the Rout Phase (RtPh), broken units may, or must (depending upon the situation), rout away from the enemy and attempt to get back into cover. The broken American squad in zG6 has a DM counter on it, which allows it to rout (although the DM itself does not force the squad to rout), and it is also adjacent to an unbroken enemy unit... which forces it to rout.

The broken squad must rout to the nearest woods or building hex that does not require it to move closer, or adjacent to, an Known Enemy Unit. With these restrictions, the only legal rout destinations it has are zG7 and zH6, both of which are 2 MF away. The American player can choose to rout to either of these hexes.

In many situations, it will be best to rout a broken unit as far away as possible from the enemy. The American player decides to do just that: the broken unit routs to zG7-zF7-zE8. It takes 6 MF to reach zE8, which is all that the routing unit has, so it must stop there. The routing unit could have stopped in zG7 – or it could have routed to zH6 and stopped there – but once a routing unit enters a woods or building hex it may continue to rout into adjacent woods or building hexes, if it wishes.



ADVANCE PHASE (rule 3.7)

In the Advance Phase (APh) the ATTACKER may move his unpinned and unbroken units into an adjacent hex... even if that hex is occupied by enemy units. Advancing into an enemy-occupied hex creates a Close Combat (CC) situation.

After the failure of their Prep Fire, the American plan had been to advance into zF5 and defeat the German defenders in CC to capture the hex. Unfortunately, the squad that was to do this broke under defensive fire and ran, ending up in zE8.

The two American squads that Prep Fired could advance... but they are too far away from the objective hex to reach it.

CLOSE COMBAT PHASE (rule 3.8)

The final phase of the player turn is the Close Combat Phase (CCPh). This is when any CC battles are resolved.

There aren't any CC situations, so the player turn is over and the Americans have lost: they failed to capture hex zF5 from the Germans.

The "Rule of 7"

You probably noticed that every DR in that short battle was a 7. While having every DR turn up identical is not realistic at all, I did it that way to illustrate an important point...

A key to playing ASL well is to be able to accurately assess the risk involved in various moves. Risk assessment is very difficult in ASL. The combat resolution mechanics cannot be easily analyzed or reduced to simple percentages, because of the dual DRs: the firer rolls to see what effect his shot has, and then the targets roll to see how they react to that effect. Any given shot will have a wide variety of possible results. You can, for example, unleash a powerful 36 FP shot only to see it have no effect whatsoever on its target... while a feeble 2 FP shot could potentially break almost any target.

So how can you tell a good risk from a bad one? How do you avoid just moving units around and hoping for good luck?

One technique that I have found useful is what I call the "Rule of 7." When you make a DR, 7 is the single most likely number to be rolled... it's right in the middle of the bell curve of DR results. If you roll lower than 7, you're having good luck; if you roll higher than 7, you're having bad luck; and if you roll exactly 7, your luck is neutral.

This fact can be applied to risk analysis during an ASL/ASLSK game: just assume that every DR will be a 7, and see what the results would be. If the results are in your favor with DRs of 7, then the move is low risk. And if the results are unfavorable with DRs of 7, then the move is high risk.

In the previous battle, the American plan was to Prep Fire two squads and use the third squad to directly assault the German position. Analyzing this plan with the Rule of 7 suggests that it will have little chance of being successful:

* On a DR of 7, the American Prep Fire will only result in a PTC... but that's not good enough, because the Americans want

to break the German defenders rather than just pin them. So the Americans will need to be lucky with their Prep Fire DR (they need to roll less than 7).

* With DRs of 7, the German units passed their PTCs with a comfortable margin. This shows that, even if the American Prep Fire gets a NMC or 1MC result, the Germans will have to be unlucky (roll more than 7) to actually break.

So the Rule of 7 clearly shows that for this American plan to be successful, the Americans would have to be lucky at the same time that the Germans are unlucky. That combination won't happen too often, so the plan is much more likely to fail than to succeed.

Now, the Rule of 7 is not a magical shortcut to ASL mastery... but can be a useful tool for experienced players and beginners alike. When in doubt, ask yourself who would win if all of the DRs were a 7; the answer will tell you a lot about which side is favored in that situation.

A Rematch

The primary purpose of this tutorial is to provide a highly detailed look at the ASLSK rules in action... and not necessarily to teach proper ASL tactics. But there's no reason that we can't combine the two! The original American plan wasn't too good, so let's play that battle again with a better plan, which will also give me the opportunity to demonstrate some additional ASLSK rules.

The Americans don't have enough FP available for their Prep Fire to have a good chance of being effective, so a better plan would be to forego Prep Fire and have all three American squads assault the German hex. In addition, the American squads all have a Smoke Exponent of 3, which is very good, so if they can place a smoke screen to cover their assault their chances of success should improve substantially.

Reset the units to their starting locations and let's see what happens...

RALLY PHASE

No activity.

PREP FIRE PHASE

No activity.

MOVEMENT PHASE

What each American squad would like to do is: (A) place smoke grenades into the Open Ground street hex between them and the German hex, and then (B) Assault Move into that hex under the cover of the smoke. But this won't work. It costs 2 MF to place smoke grenades into an adjacent hex, and it costs 2 more MF to then move into that hex (1 MF for Open Ground + 1 MF extra for smoke). That's a total of 4 MF, which means that they could not use Assault Movement. You can only use Assault Movement if you expend less than your total MF allowance, so the Americans must limit their MF expenditure to 3 MF in order to be able to use Assault Movement.

The Americans can't declare Double Time to get the extra MFs they need, because combining Double Time and Assault Movement is illegal. (The prohibition against this is not actually in either the ASLSK #1 or #2 rulebook... but it is in the ASLSK #3 rulebook, and the full ASL rulebook as well. If a revised ASLSK #1 rulebook is ever published that incorporates all known errata, the prohibition would certainly be included.)

The inability of a single squad to use Assault Movement to both place smoke in an adjacent hex and then move into it will force the Americans to be a bit more creative in their attack...

The First Move

The American player announces that the squad in zF7 will use normal movement (4 MF available). The squad starts by expending 2 MF to place smoke in the adjacent hex zF6. The smoke dr is 4, which is greater than the Smoke Exponent of 3, so the smoke placement attempt is unsuccessful.

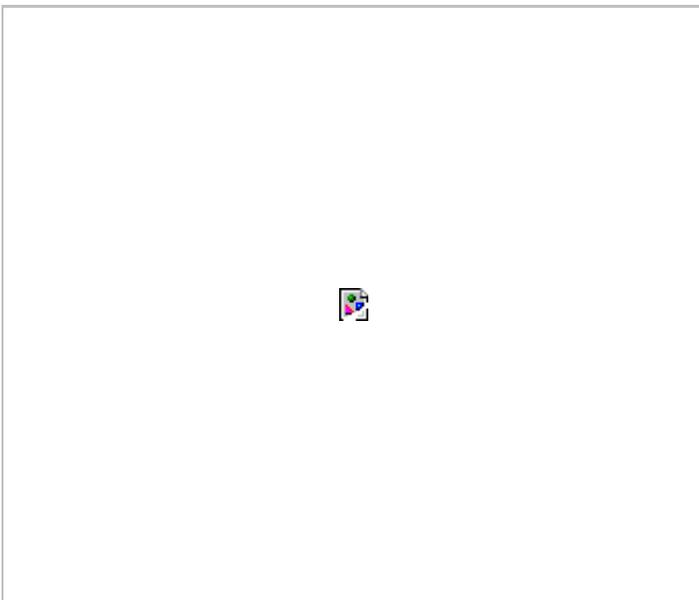
The American player now pauses to allow the German player the opportunity to use Defensive First Fire against the moving American squad. Note that any expenditure of MF counts as "moving" even if the unit did not actually enter a new hex. At a range of two hexes, the German FP would be 4; the DRMs are -1 leadership, -1 FFNAM, +3 stone building. So the defensive fire would be a 4/+1 shot... not a very good shot (there would be no effect on a DR of 7), so the German player declines to fire.

The American squad now expends 1 MF to enter zE7, and again the Germans have an opportunity to fire. The DRMs would now be -1 leadership, -1 FFMO, and -1 FFNAM, so the shot would be a 4/-3, which is a pretty good shot (1MC on a DR of 7). But again the Germans decline to shoot. They will hold their fire until an American squad moves adjacent, when PBF will double their FP.

Why did the American squad move to zE7 instead of zF6? They do not want more than one of their assaulting squads to enter a hex. The German defensive fire is going to be devastating enough as it is... moving two or more squads into the same hex will just make it even worse: first squad enters a hex; Germans fire and leave Residual FP; then the second squad enters the hex, gets attacked first by the Residual FP from the first attack, and then by another German attack directed specifically at them. With three assaulting squads, the American player will want to move each of them into a different hex so that they can avoid any Residual FP attacks.

The American squad now expends its last MF to enter zE6, and finally the Germans open fire: 4 FP doubled to 8 FP because of PBF, and a -3 DRM from leadership, FFMO, and FFNAM, the shot is 8/-3. The German DR is 8, so 5 on the 8 FP column of the IFT is a 2MC.

The American Morale Level is 6, and their Morale Check DR is 8, which is increased to 10 because of the 2MC. 10 is greater than 6, so the American squad is broken; and 10 is also greater than 6 + 3 (Morale + ELR), so the 1st Line 6(3)-6-6 squad is replaced by a broken 2nd Line 5(2)-4-6 squad (rule 5.1). A DM counter is placed on top of the broken squad, and a 4 Residual FP counter is placed on top of the stack. A First Fire counter is placed on top of the German units.



You might be wondering what the Smoke Exponent number represents, especially since it is often a low number that makes the successful use of smoke grenades difficult. First, notice that only a full squad can attempt to use smoke grenades (half squads and leaders can never place smoke). This indicates that a successful smoke screen is not the result of a single smoke grenade, but rather requires a lot of them. Then, given the large size of each hex (40 meters) and the short duration of a WWII smoke grenade (about 30 seconds, or one-fourth of a two minute turn), it becomes clear that, to place a useful smoke screen, you have to throw a lot of smoke grenades, very quickly, and spread them out to cover the entire hex.

American squads have much higher Smoke Exponents than German squads simply because American soldiers were well-supplied with all types of munitions. The Smoke Exponents that are printed on the counters are only for regular soldiers, who would not normally carry lots of smoke grenades; if a scenario were to designate a squad as being specially trained assault engineers, those engineers will usually be given a Smoke Exponent much higher than that printed on the counter (usually a 4 or a 5).

When you make a smoke dr, you are checking several things: does the squad actually have enough smoke grenades on hand? do they have them ready to use with each soldier understanding where he needs to throw his grenade? and did they execute the placement attempt correctly to create a usable smoke screen?

The Second Move

The American player now declares that the squad in zG7 will use Assault Movement (3 MF maximum), and will expend 2 MF to place smoke into zG6. The smoke dr is 2, so a +2 Smoke counter is placed in zG6.

The Germans cannot fire at this squad... yet. The German units have a First Fire counter on them, so their next shot will be a Subsequent First Fire (SFF) shot. A moving unit can never be fired upon with SFF if there is another friendly unit closer to the defending unit. In this case, the broken squad in zE6 is adjacent to the Germans, so they will only be able to make a SFF shot against a unit that moves adjacent to them.

The American squad then spends its last MF to enter zF6, and the Germans announce a Subsequent First Fire shot against them. SFF shots are taken at one-half FP, so the shot is 4 FP, cut in half to 2 FP because of SFF, doubled back to 4 FP because of PBF, and DRMs of -1 leadership and -1 FFMO (Assault Movement cancels the -1 FFNAM DRM), a 4/-2. The DR is 7, which is a 1MC (5 on the 4 FP column).

The American Morale Check DR is 8, increased to 9 by the 1MC, so the squad breaks but is not replaced by a lower quality unit. Flip the American squad to its broken side, place a DM on it, place a 2 Residual FP on the stack, and flip the First Fire counter on the Germans over to its Final Fire side.



The Third Move

The American player now announces that the squad in zH6 will move using Assault Movement. It expends 2 MF to enter zG6 (1 MF for Open Ground + 1 MF for smoke).

The German squad has used its one allowed First Fire shot, and its one allowed Subsequent First Fire shot, so for the remainder of the American MPH it can only make Final Protective Fire (FPF) shots. Unlike First Fire and Subsequent First Fire attacks, there is no limit to the number of FPF attacks a defending squad can make, but FPF can only be used against units moving adjacent to the defending squad.

If the Germans fire at this third American squad, the shot will be 4 FP, cut in half to 2 FP because of FPF, doubled back to 4 FP because of PBF, and DRMs of -1 leadership and +2 smoke (the smoke cancels FFMO, and Assault Movement cancels FFNAM). The shot would be a 4/+1... but the DR for the shot will also be a NMC roll for the German squad and leader. Defending units that use FPF are close to panicking just from the proximity of so many enemy units, so there is a risk involved.

Now the question is: should the Germans take this FPF shot?

This is a situation in which the Rule of 7 is not much help: it suggests that the FPF will be ineffective, neither breaking or pinning the Americans nor breaking the Germans. But, in this particular situation, if the Germans fire and are lucky enough to pin or break the Americans, they will win the scenario; if they are unlucky enough to break themselves, they will lose the scenario. If the Germans decline to fire, the American squad will advance into the hex and the scenario will be decided in Close Combat. In theory, given enough time, you could eventually figure out which course of action gives the Germans the greatest chance of victory, but in an actual game situation it's just a judgment call.

For the purposes of this tutorial, however, the Germans will take that FPF shot, a 4/+1. The German DR is 4, but this is a doubles roll (2,2) which triggers cowering.

Cowering in ASL originally confuses a lot of players, because you normally think of cowering as something that occurs when you are fired upon, rather than when you are firing. In other words, how can being ordered to fire on the enemy cause you to cower? But most actions in a turn of ASL are actually occurring simultaneously, even though the turn itself is broken into sequential steps for ease of play. So while the Germans are firing at the Americans, the Americans are also firing as they approach the German position (even though such firing will not be resolved until the AFPh). In most situations, you can't fire at the enemy without exposing yourself to their fire, so when you roll doubles some of your soldiers have decided that they would just as soon stay under cover this turn and not be shot at, which reduces your firing effectiveness by requiring you to resolve the shot using the next lowest IFT column.

In this case, however, there is a leader present. Whenever a leader is directing the fire, cowering does not occur. This is true even if the leader has a Leadership Modifier of 0 or +1 (or even a +2 from a wounded 6+1!). The German FPF shot, then, remains a 4/+1, and the DR of 4 results in a 1MC.

The American squad's Morale Check DR is also a 4, which is increased to 5 by the 1MC. 5 is less than their Morale Level of 6, so they pass the 1MC.

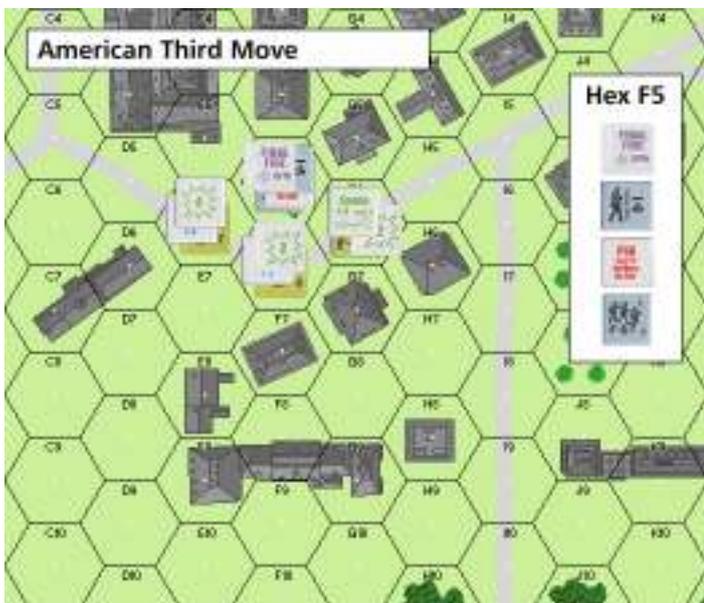
Because this was a FPF shot, the Germans also have to use their original 4 DR as a NMC for both the leader and the squad, but they both pass this NMC easily. (The leader's Morale is 9, and the squad's Morale is 7 with a -1 DRM from the leader if he doesn't pin or break.)

Now the Germans have the opportunity to take a second FPF shot at the Americans. The American squad expended 2 MF to enter the smoke hex, so the Germans are allowed to fire at them twice, one shot for each MF expended. This again brings up the question of whether the Germans should take this shot... but since they took the first FPF shot, they might as well take the second one, since multiple FPF shots do not involve any additional penalties to the firer other than the multiple NMCs.

This second FPF shot remains a 4/+1, and the DR is 8. This fails to have any effect at all on the American squad (9 on the 4 FP column of the IFT).

The DR 8 is then applied as a NMC to the Germans. The leader passes this NMC, because his Morale of 9 is greater than 8. The leader's -1 Leadership Modifier then reduces the 8 to a 7, which is applied to the German squad. 7 equals the squad's Morale Level of 7, so the squad is pinned. Place a Pin counter on top of the squad, but under the leader, to show that the squad is pinned but the leader is not.

And, finally, place a 2 Residual FP counter on top of the American squad. Residual FP is not cumulative, so even though the Germans fired into that hex twice, only 2 Residual FP is placed. The only way for that 2 Residual FP to be increased would be if a stronger attack would later target that hex. That is, a dozen 4 FP attacks could hit a hex, and only 2 Residual FP would be placed there; but then if an 8 FP attack hit that hex, the 2 Residual FP would be replaced by a 4 Residual FP counter.



At this point, the MPh is complete. There are no more American units to move (the Americans cannot enter the German-occupied hex during the MPh), and there are no more First Fire, SFF, or PPF shots to resolve. Remove the smoke counter and the Residual FP counters.

DEFENSIVE FIRE PHASE

The German units have a Final Fire counter on them, so they are not allowed to fire in the DFPh. Remove the Final Fire counter.

ADVANCING FIRE PHASE

The unbroken American squad in zG6 can now fire on the Germans, although all shots in the AFPh are at one-half strength, because moving units cannot fire as effectively as stationary units.

The FP for this shot is 6, cut in half to 3 FP because it is the AFPh, doubled back to 6 FP because of PBF, increased to 7 FP because of the assault fire bonus (underlined FP factor). The 6 FP column of the IFT must be used, because the FP is less than 8, and there is a +3 TEM DRM because of the stone building, so the shot is $6/+3$. The DR is 11, which has no effect.



ROUT PHASE

The two broken American squads are adjacent to a Known unbroken enemy unit and must rout. The squad in zE6 will spend 4 MF to rout to zD6 (mandatory) and then zC7 (optional). The squad in zF6 will spend 4 MF to rout to zF7 (must rout to zF7 or zG7) and then zF8 (optional).

To see if an ambush occurs, both players make a dr. The Americans have no drms, and roll a 3. The Germans have a +1 drm for being pinned, and a -1 drm for a directing leader, so the two drms will cancel each other. The Germans roll a 4. Neither side rolled 3 less than the other, so no ambush occurs.

Both players must designate their CC attacks before any are resolved. The American player designates his CC attacks first, because he is currently the ATTACKER.

The American squad declares that it will attack both German units. A leader in CC will normally attack and defend in combination with the squad on which it is stacked, unless the leader decides to make a CC attack by himself (in which case he could be attacked by himself). What the German leader is going to do does not matter in this situation... the American squad must attack and kill both German units, while surviving their attack, in order to win the scenario. Leaders have a FP of 1 in CC, so the American CC attack will be 6 to 5, which is 1-1 odds.

When figuring the CC Odds Ratio to use, always round in favor of the defending unit. So the Americans would need 7.5 FP to get 3-2 odds, and 10 FP to get 2-1 odds, etc. Terrain has no effect on CC, except to allow or prohibit the possibility of an ambush (that is, there are no TEM DRMs in CC).

The German CC attack will be at 1-2 odds. The German squad's CC FP is cut in half to 2 FP because it is pinned, but the leader's 1 FP makes the attack 3 to 6 (the Germans would need at least 6 FP to get 1-1 odds). Note that pinned units in CC defend at full strength, but attack at half strength.

Combining their CC FP to get a 1-2 attack, with a -1 DRM from the leader's Leadership Modifier, gives the Germans their best chance of killing the American squad. If they attacked separately, at 1-4 (2 to 6) and 1-6 (1 to 6) with no leadership (a leader cannot "lead" himself), their chances of success would be very poor.

The American CC DR is 8, which is greater than the 1-1 CC Kill Number of 5, so there is no effect.

The German CC DR is 5, and the -1 leadership DRM makes it a 4, which is equal to the 1-2 CC Kill Number. The American squad suffers Casualty Reduction and is replaced by a 3-4-6 HS, but it is not broken.

Note that even if the American CC attack had killed the German units, the German CC attack would still be resolved, because all CC combat is simultaneous if there is no ambush.

The Pin counter is removed, and a Melee counter is placed on the stack because there are still units from both sides present, and at least one of them is unbroken.

The player turn is now over, and the Americans have again lost. The presence of any German unit in zF5, even if it was only a broken one, prevents the Americans from capturing that hex (see "Control" in the list of Definitions).



In truth, this is a very tough situation for the Americans to win... but they came much closer with this second plan. They really need more turns to work with, and possibly a leader of their own. But it can often be fun, as well as instructive, to try to find a way to win when the odds are against you.

Final Comments

I've optimistically included "Part 1" in the title of this tutorial, in the hopes that I can do a few more. But that really depends upon whether this tutorial proves to be useful to new players trying to learn the game. Your comments as to the usefulness of this tutorial, especially if you are a new player trying to learn the game, are welcome.

My tentative plan for a "Part 2" would be to cover support weapons, probably using the same basic situation. I'm thinking of giving the German defenders a MMG, and then show three American assaults: one with MG support, one with a demo charge, and one with a flamethrower. But I'm open to any suggestions as to what might be a better course to follow.

What I find most striking here is how long and detailed this article became. Those of us who play ASL always like to describe it as a rich and detailed game, but we also tend to sort of take that for granted. Analyzing this very simple scenario has reminded me of just how rich and detailed ASL really is. I can't help thinking that, if you were to discuss a half-turn, three vs one attack in most other wargames, you might have a difficult time writing more than one or two paragraphs... but this feels like I've written a small book, and I could have gone into yet greater detail in a few areas!

As is always the case with an article of this length, I've undoubtedly made a few errors. I'll get them fixed as they are pointed out to me.
