

# RED BANNER



Quarterly Fanzine of the Capital Area Advanced Squad Leader (ASL) Hobby Club

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## Commissar's Call: *Fires and the Fourth Dimension*



Since we're closing out the year, let's ponder time in the context of ASL.

Understanding how Fire Phases in Advanced Squad Leader (ASL) incorporate time can help one recall and apply important rules. So, this article presents a discussion of some oft-overlooked rules within the context of time. Ironically, that requires discussing some rules "out of order." Humorously, it affords an opportunity to reflect on how ASL illustrates the Arrow or Time.

Let's start at the beginning with the aptly named prep fire phase. It's the only time you can place FULL strength SMOKE which must be fired FIRST (C8.5) since the smoke takes time to billow and might affect other fires. One can also fire SMOKE in defensive fire, but only dispersed. This is a classic/obvious example of how ASL's phase-based turn structure models the flow of time in combat. A more subtle (sneaky) example involves a gun, that did not prep fire, changing its covered arc at the end of the phase (C3.22), perhaps to fire in the advancing fire phase without the penalty of case A for fire outside of one's covered arc! That models time by exposing the gun to defensive fires before it can shoot, sacrificing its rate of fire, and incurring the usual case B (+2) penalty for fire in the advance fire phase (C5.2) – yet another nod to the ticking clock – but completely avoids the penalty for changing covered arc which is a boon for a gun in woods or building where that penalty would be at least +6, depending on the extent of the pivot. An AFV could use this same end-of-fire phase pivot procedure (so long as it did not fire) at the end of its prep fire phase to ensure a favorable target facing against imminent defensive fire and then return fire in the advancing fire phase. "Such a change in the PFPh cancels any movement possibilities for that Gun (even a vehicular Gun) and its crew for the rest of the Player Turn, but does not prevent that Gun from attacking in the AFPh – presumably now without any case A DRM." In essence, the rules acknowledge the flow of time by allowing a gun to use the prep fire phase to make a time-consuming pivot for its own sake or for a later shot in the advancing fire phase. So, we see that in addition to allowing the attacker a first shot, the prep fire phase represents time in other less obvious (easier to forget) ways.

Time tracking underlies the interplay of fire and movement during the movement and defensive fire phases. The unifying theme is that fire opportunities are time dependent. By letting time lapse, a player forgoes opportunities, presumably to later optimize fires (with less time remaining) based on changing positions (movement).

Here again we can start with the obvious and work our way to the minutia. The interjection of defensive first fire into the movement phase (A8.1) clearly illustrates the impact of time on fire opportunities since the defender's fires are dependent on the attacker's movement point expenditures, a measure of time. It's easy to forget, however, that defensive first fire is an ever-shrinking window of opportunity – use it or lose it. It's not a question of now (first fire) or later (final fire); but rather, now or never. For example, imagine three squads moving closer to a single defending squad. For a variety of valid reasons, the defender may wish to hold fire until after all three attacking squads have each completed their separate moves, in which case the defender would, barring rate of fire, get one full shot via defensive final fire.

Same said defender could have had at least two safe shots, one at full and one at half, if he availed defensive first fire while one of the squads was moving. As noted, the defender may have had good cause to hold fire; but must still realize the “opportunity lost” by forsaking defensive first fire during enemy movement.

For guns, the opportunity lost by waiting until defensive final fire could include the loss of intensive fire (C5.6) capability. Recall that if a unit exhausts its rate of fire during defensive first fire it is marked “first fire” whereas one that exhausts rate of fire during defensive final fire is marked “final fire.” Per C5.6, a unit marked “final fire” can NOT conduct intensive fire. So, if three attacking tanks are closing on one defending gun the surest way for that gun to maximize its number of shots is to start firing on them during defensive first fire rather than waiting until defensive final fire. For example, if said gun exhausts its rate of fire during enemy movement it would be marked “first fire” and therefore still eligible, under the right conditions, to conduct intensive fire during defensive final fire (A8.41). If, however, the gun waits until final fire to fire its first shot and then exhausts its rate of fire it would be marked “final fire” and therefore ineligible for intensive fire, since it has run out of time.

Bounding first fire (D3.3) presents attacking vehicles with fire opportunities during the movement phase. This good use of time (rather than waiting until the advancing fire phase) enables vehicular guns to retain their rate of fire, but without acquisition. And, a lucky vehicular gun that does not exhaust its rate of fire even gets one more shot during the advancing fire phase (D3.32). Readers might scoff and say that’s unlikely. Indeed, but you can’t get lucky if you don’t try. (I feel like I’ve heard before, under a different set of circumstances.)

To further reflect time pressure, all sorts of penalties afflict advancing fire (A3.5, C.4, etc.): half fire power for infantry, canister, and machine guns, cases B and C for vehicles/guns, etc. Among the litany of generally known items, there are some finer points to note. For infantry/cavalry one can remedy the depredations of advancing fire by declaring opportunity fire (A7.25) in the prep fire phase. This option plays on time by clearly rewarding waiting for scouts to uncover concealed/hidden enemy units at the risk of suffering defensive fire first. Because it’s quick and dirty, white phosphorus is the only form of SMOKE that one can fire (dispersed) during advancing fire (C8.6), and as usual it must be fired first. Also interesting, a vehicular machine gun main armament can attempt a to kill dice roll as ordnance (D3.53) even though MG are ordinarily halved for advancing fire and therefore ineligible for to kill attempts (A9.61). That last one may have less to do with time than making early war tanks “competitive,” but it occurs during advancing fire and is crucial to remember.

And that brings us to the Arrow of Time. As the theory goes, time moves in but one direction – forward – so we cannot travel to the past and undo/redo it (A.2). Thankfully, even in tournament play, I’ve seen players relax and allow a grieving opponent a chance to remedy an easy-to-fix oversight; but one always has the right to invoke A.2 by declaring, “That time has passed.”

## **Conscripts’ Chatter: *The Tank Museum, Bovington***



**By David Wiesenhahn**

According to their guidebook, this museum “holds the finest and most historically significant collect of fighting armor in the world.” It has the only running Tiger tank, which was used in the movie Fury and is brought out several times a year. They also produce an excellent series of YouTube videos. When we were planning this trip, my wife sent me an article about how their YouTube channel gets more views than the Louvre. She asked me if I had ever heard of the museum, and I told her that that’s the museum that we would be visiting. Now she was impressed.

We visited on a quiet Thursday. The museum has three main sections. One section chronicles the development of the tank, starting in 1915 and up to modern times. Another section is devoted to WW2, and a third section focuses on tanks during the times of trenches in WW1. There are smaller areas with displays of the Sherman used in Fury, cold-war tanks, and a cut-in-half Centurion Mark 3.

The WW2 area had many of the AFVs that we are familiar with. The only WW2 Russian tanks I remember seeing were two T-34s (one with Finnish markings), but there were many German, British, and US tanks on display. Seeing these vehicles and walking around them was interesting and, as an engineer myself, seeing their evolution over 100 years was fascinating. It was humbling standing next to a JagdTiger - that thing is massive! Besides the well-know vehicles, I learned about some vehicles that I was less familiar with.

Some logistics: Bovington is about 100 miles southwest of London. We stayed in Poole, which is easy to get to from London via a 3 hour train ride. Poole is on the coast and is a popular destination in the summer. Besides the tank museum, Poole has history of its own (it was a major embarkation point for D-Day), take a ferry to France, or visit some of the natural areas in the area.



## **Churchill War Rooms, London**

We spent a long morning at this museum, which is really two museums in one: the underground command and control center of the British military during WW2, and a museum dedicated to Winston Churchill himself. The war rooms were depicted in the movie *Darkest Hour*, which was about Churchill's tense first month as Prime Minister.

Walking through the museum, we saw the room where the war cabinet met, the map room, and the small room where Churchill could talk securely to Roosevelt. Since London was bombed throughout the war, the rooms were underground, protected by layers of concrete and steel. There were also living accommodations for the people working long hours down there, isolated from the world above them. We learned about their lives and what it was like to live through those times. One display had a notebook documented the daily to-do list. It was opened to what appeared to be a list of routine tasks like I might have in my notebook, except that date was 6 June 1944, and that day was titled "D-Day."

The Churchill museum was likewise excellent. The museum covered both his military and political career, as well as his personal life. I knew a little about Churchill, but it was great to walk my way through it, and I was able to fill in some gaps in what I knew about him.

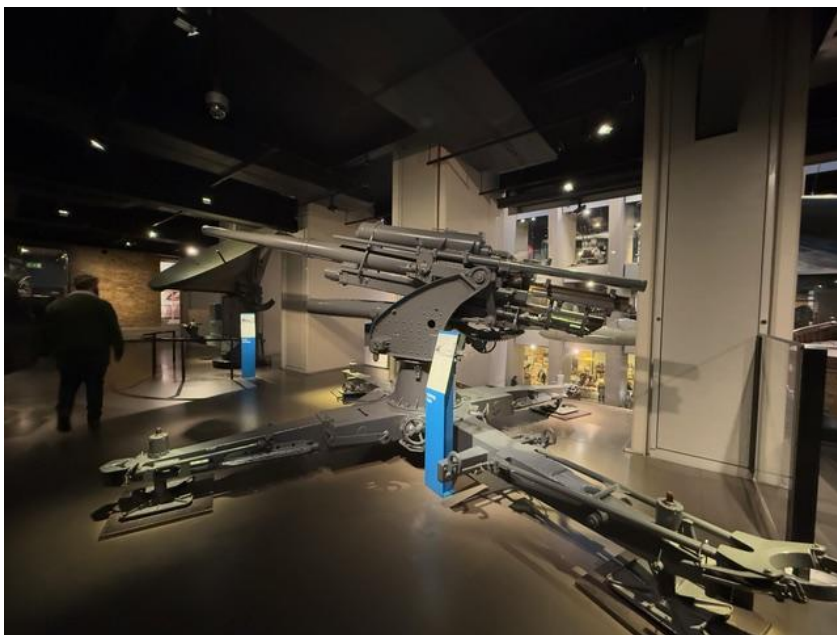
If you're staying in London, the Churchill War Rooms are easy to get to via the Underground or walking.

## **Imperial War Museum, London**

I had been to this museum about 25 years ago but didn't remember much of it. When we entered the museum, we walked into a large open area, with an AV-8, a Spitfire, and a Japanese Ohka suicide rocket plane hanging from the ceiling. There was also a V-2 on the ground, and a T-34 tucked away in the rear. There were many other hardware displays, including a German 88 and a cross-section of a Lancaster bomber. We spent most of the day walking through the displays.

The museum has three main sections: WW1, WW2, and a section on the holocaust. The museum isn't especially large, but it is very well done. In addition to the usual displays focusing on military aspects of the wars, there were good overviews of the geopolitical events leading up the wars. The holocaust section started with the origins of the Hitler and the Nazi party, through the establishment of the camps, their liberation, finishing with the stories of the survivors afterwards as they tried to return to a normal life. A very sobering, somber experience.

The Imperial War Museum is in London, outside the central district but very easy to get to via the Underground.



## **Amazing ASL Lore: *How I Earned the “Best Anti-Armor Award”***

By Andy Goldin

Those of you who can find your way to my partially underground command bunker nestled inconspicuously in the northern Virginia suburbs will notice a peculiar award on the wall. It sits across from the ashtray-size commemorative metal display plates I bought in Bosnia and my ‘love me’ shadow-box of service ribbons and unit patches. It hangs conspicuously from my ASL bookshelf, above the couple of ASLOK name tags and a shell fragment from Omaha beach Perry gave me when he returned from his trip to France, however many years ago.

It says: DC CONSCRIPTS WARGAME CLUB, AUG 2000 BEST ANTI-ARMOR  
Why would any keep such a chochkie? Well, I’ll tell you why...

August, 2000, I think I got an email notification about the game day that day. That was the “1.0” version of the Club, before it went into remission and was revived years later. But that’s another story.

At that time, I had been playing ASL intermittently since my friend John Mueller first introduced me to Squad Leader sometime around 1980. I had kept up with Squad Leader and had all the ASL modules up to that time, more or less. While I had all the gear, the problem was always a) setting aside the time to play and b) finding an opponent. In the days before VASL was widely used, this required some effort, with the result being, if you wanted to play, you needed to show up at a game day.

So there I was – at the monthly DC Conscripts game day at a library nearby Tysons Corner, Virginia. My opponent was a much more experienced Conscript – one of the guys who was running the club at the time. Feeling somewhat intimidated, I agreed to play a scenario which I want to say was WO03 Counterattack at Carentan.

I'll swear this was the scenario, but the ASL Scenario Archive says the scenario wasn't released until 2011, eleven years after the day of the award. While the scenario might not be right, I do remember the general flow of the game and a specific sequence of events.

I was the defending Americans. I remember setting up my Americans generally along the forward hedgerow and in the woods off the road. Not being all that clear on A12.34 Hidden Guns, I put my 57L AT Gun on the rear board, with its line of fire straight down the road, for all to see. My opponent shrugged at the sight of my ATG and did his setup. As I recall, I was able to keep most of his force hung-up in the hedgerows. However, he did manage to blast me out of the woods on my right flank, where my troops didn't have the benefit of the protection of the hedgerows. Shifting my forces over to plug the hole created another gap on the road, through which he drove one of his StuGs.

Down the road it came, toward my AT gun. I held my fire, partially because I didn't know if I had a clear shot, and partially because I didn't really know what else to do. Finally, he moved the Stug directly in front of my Gun, one hex away.

"Twenty-five percent", is what he said. "You have a 25% percent chance of scoring a hit."

I didn't understand, and don't remember how he came up with those numbers. Not having any other options, I said, "I'll take it" and threw two dice. The result? "2, 2" A Hit! My opponent threw his hands in the air, not believing my luck (or his bad luck). The drama attracted an audience, as another more senior Conscript came up to watch the action.

"OK, you still have to kill it".

I replied, "OK". The odds weren't great, probably a '7' or less, to get a kill. I throw the dice for what I assumed would be my only chance at knocking out this Stug. The result? Another 2,2, knocking out the Stug!

A cry went out – of frustration and disappointment by my opponent, and one of disbelief by the observer. "He earned the award", said the observer.

I don't remember if I officially won the scenario or if my opponent simply gave up in frustration at being unable to beat my lucky dice. Regardless, at the end of the game day, I was presented with the "Best Anti-Armor" award by the DC Conscripts Wargaming Club. And on my wall it rests to this very day.

# MONGOLS IN MANCHUKUO



Scenario Design: John Gorkowski

**Nomonhan, Manchuria, May 11, 1939:** Japan's conquest of Manchuria in 1931 set the stage for friction with the Soviet Union. Japan armed its newly created puppet state, Manchukuo, starting in 1932 while the Soviet's struck a formal defense agreement with Mongolia in 1936. Border incidents between the two major powers routinely exceeded 100 per year. A soon-to-be famous clash started as a cavalry skirmish on May 11, 1939, when about 80 Mongolian troops crossed the Khalkin River (Japan's declared boundary) to graze and water their horses closer to Nomonhan (Russia's declared boundary) about 13 kilometers deep into the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo.

## BALANCE:

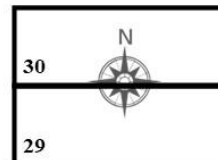


Add one LMG at start.



Promote one 8-0 to a 9-1.

## BOARD LAYOUT:



**VICTORY CONDITIONS:** Manchukuo (the Manchus) win at game end if they accumulate at least 2 CVP more than the Mongols.

## TURN RECORD CHART

	Mongolia Sets Up First	1	2	3	4	5
	Manchukuo Moves First					

**Cavalry of the Mongolian People's Republic (MPR):** Set up first with all units dismounted as infantry and no more than one MMC per hex anywhere within two hexes of 29Q1. Use Russian counters.



ELR: 2  
SAN: 3

1					
4-4-7	8-0	7-0	LMG	Squad Horse	
8				8	

**Cavalry of Manchukuo:** Enter anywhere along the east edge on turn 1. Use Japanese counters.



ELR: 2  
SAN: 3

2					
3-4-7	8-0	LMG	Squad Horse		
11	2	2	11		

## SCENARIO SPECIFIC RULES:

1. Use Steppe Terrain (F13.2). EC are moderate with no wind.
2. For all purposes, treat the Mongolians as Russian (A25.2) and the Manchus as Japanese (G1).
3. For the duration of game turn 1, all Manchu units are fanatic (A10.8); they lose that status starting on game turn 2.
4. Mongolian units can exit off the west edge without counting toward CVP totals.

**POST SCRIPT:** Per Japanese doctrine, a detachment of Manchu cavalry counter attacked the Mongolian incursion that same day. The Mongols fled leaving five dead troops, four dead horses, and a cache of small arms in their wake. Japan had won the opening skirmish, but the Russians would return to eventually win the four-month-long battle of Khalkhin Gol.

## Primary Source:

Nomonhan: Japanese-Soviet Tactical Combat, 1939, by Edward J. Drea, Combat Studies Institute, January 1981