

Red Banner

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



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Commissar's Call: Welcome



Welcome to the inaugural issue of *Red Banner* a new fanzine for an old club. “Commissar’s Corner” will be the place in that fanzine for my stirring words of wisdom to the club/hobby community.

Let’s start at the beginning with a tribute to the early revolutionaries: John Slotwinski (founder of the DC Conscripts in 1998), Chris Baer (the first ever District Commissar), John Appel (erstwhile Minister of Truth), and Tom Meier (the firm, but fair Major Tom). They established our first newsletter, *Scripts*, some 17 years ago. Way back then, monthly club meetings at Little Wars in Fairfax usually mustered a platoon of eager gamers.

Where are we today? I returned from an overseas assignment in 2016 to find the club a shadow of its former self. We could barely muster a half squad once per month. Sometimes even less, once I was the only Single Man Counter present. Imagine a lone 7-0 SMC in a game store full of “mages” playing *Tragic the Gathering*. OK, I’m not making fun of them; but some good-natured ribbing is always in style. Anyway, our numbers have declined and dispersed. We need to rally. And that requires a Commissar!

So, drink your vodka ration and grab your trusty “Papasha.” Follow me to the T-34s that will carry us into battle! What’s that? “Who the hell are you?” you ask me while panting frozen breath in the midnight air as you struggle to keep up on the snowy steppe. I’m a middle-aged bureaucrat who finally has time to return to this game of his youth. And you are my charges who might one day rise to be a Hero of the ASL Union.

Now that you are rallied, let’s talk logistics.

Another easy-to-use meeting place could boost our attendance. I recommend the Kingstowne Center for Active Adults, 6488 Landsdowne Center, Alexandria, VA 22315, under the rubric of the Kingstowne Gamers Brigade (KGB). That is, the KGB game club already has arrangements with the Center to meet there one weekend per month. We need only show up at the Center during the KGB’s regularly scheduled meeting to avail the space.

I’ve attended KGB meetings over the years. They usually gather about a dozen grognards playing all sorts of war games and welcome new arrivals. I’ve played ASL there twice this year and attracted a small following each time. Three separate people have expressed interest in “rejoining” the hobby. So, by going to KGB meetings at the Center we find space and recruits.

Fred runs the KGB. When he advertises meeting times I will gladly pass on to my comrades in the DC Conscripts so that they might attend as well. Who knows, you might even spend a weekend with a different game?

Conscripts' Chatter: *Proletariat Pundits*



Here's where you – the readers – express your perspective via questions, statements, etc. The Commissar tolerates OBD, off board dissent, but keep it here rather than on board during game day.

“Will this rag be all about the Russians?” asked one intrepid reader. No, but our club name and hobby lineage cry out for a Soviet motif. Given the Soviet contribution to victory in WWII, that makes sense too. Also, keep in mind that not all Soviets were Russian. We often lump a whole bunch of nationalities together (incorrectly) under the term Russian. People from Poland to Mongolia and everywhere in between found themselves in the Red Army and labeled as Russians which of course they were not.

As 2016 drew to a close, our members did notice increasing interest in ASL. After our club game day on December 31, a veteran commented, “That was one of the most Conscripts I've seen out at once for a club meeting (four games going at once) since the old days.” Already we see a resurgence. NOVA ASLers unite!

New Article: *Small Unit Actions during the German Campaign in Russia*

Each issue of Red Banner includes one new article. In this issue, our article examines a U.S. Army pamphlet, no. 20-269, from 1953!

<http://www.allworldwars.com/Small-Unit-Actions-During-German-Campaign-in-Russia.html>

http://www.history.army.mil/html/books/104/104-22-1/CMH_Pub_104-22-1.pdf

SMALL UNIT ACTIONS DURING THE GERMAN CAMPAIGN IN RUSSIA
by General-Major Burkhardt Mueiler-Hillebrand, General-Major Heilmuth Reinhardt, and others

PREFACE

Department of the Army Pamphlet No. 20-269, Small Unit Actions During the German Campaign in Russia, is published as an adjunct to existing training literature in the belief that much can be learned from other armies, particularly the vanquished. It does not embody official training doctrine. Although called a historical study, it is not such according to a precise interpretation of the term. It is rather a series of interesting and instructive small unit actions based on the personal experience of Germans who actually took part in them.

ORLANDO WARD

Major General, USA Chief, Military History

WASHINGTON, D. C.

JANUARY 1953

Wow! This is a scenario designer's gold mine. You can take sources like this to create the core of a new scenario and then cross check with others to polish. That's how we created *Wave upon Wave* which appears in this issue of Red Banner. But wait, there's more. The pamphlet provides some historical perspective by analyzing foreign soldiers without any concern for political correctness. This tells us something about 1953 as well as 1943! Behold how the decadent capitalists admire the hearty Russian soldier.

II. The Russian Soldier

The Germans found, however, that to be acquainted with Russian tactics and organization was useful but by no means decisive in achieving victory in battle. Far more important was the proper understanding of the Russian soldier's psyche, a process involving the analysis of his natural impulses and reactions in different situations. Only thus were the Germans able to anticipate Russian behavior in a given situation and draw the necessary conclusions for their own course of action. Any analysis of the outstanding characteristics of the Russian soldier must begin with his innate qualities.

a. Character. The Slav psyche—especially where it is under more or less pronounced Asiatic influences—covers a wide range in which fanatic conviction, extreme bravery, and cruelty bordering on bestiality are coupled with childlike kindness and susceptibility to sudden fear and terror. His fatalistic attitude enables the Russian to bear extreme hardship and privation. He can suffer without succumbing. At times the Russian soldier displayed so much physical and moral fortitude that he had to be considered a first-rate fighter. On the other hand, he was by no means immune to the terrors of a battle of attrition with its combination of massed fire, bombs, and flame throwers. Whenever he was unprepared for their impact, these weapons of destruction had a long-lasting effect. In some instances, when he was dealt a severe, well-timed blow, a mass reaction of fear and terror would throw him and his comrades completely off balance.

b. Kinship With Nature. The Russian soldier's kinship with nature was particularly pronounced. As a child of nature the Russian instinctively knew how to take advantage of every opportunity nature offered. He was inured to cold, hot, and wet weather.

With animal-like instinct he was able to find cover and adapt himself to any terrain. Darkness, fog, and snowdrifts were no handicap to him. Even under enemy fire he skillfully dug a foxhole and disappeared underground without any visible effort. He used his axe with great dexterity, felling trees, building shelters, blockhouses, and bunkers, and constructing bridges across waterways or corduroy roads through swamps and mud. Working in any weather, he accomplished each job with an instinctive urge to find protection against the effect of modern weapons of destruction.

c. Frugality. The frugality of the Russian soldier was beyond German comprehension. The average rifleman was able to hold out for days without hot food, prepared rations, bread, or tobacco. At such times he subsisted on wild berries or the bark of trees. His personal equipment consisted of a small field bag, an overcoat, and occasionally one blanket which had to suffice even in severe winter weather. Since he traveled so light, he was extremely mobile and did not depend on the arrival of rations and personal equipment during the course of operations.

d. Physical Fitness. From the outset of the Russian campaign the German tactical superiority was partly compensated for by the greater physical fitness of Russian officers and men. During the first winter, for instance, the German Army High Command noticed to its grave concern that the Russians had no intention of digging in and allowing operations to stagnate along fixed fronts. The lack of shelter failed to deter the Russians from besieging German strong points by day and night, even though the temperature had dropped to -40° F. Officers, commissars, and men were exposed to subzero temperatures for many days without relief. The essentially healthy Russian soldier with his high standard of physical fitness was capable of superior physical courage in combat.' Moreover, in line with the materialistic concepts of communism, the life of a human being meant little to a Russian leader. Man had been converted into a commodity, measured exclusively in terms of quantity and capability.



That bit on physical fitness paired with the following comment on winter conditions in Russia serves as an ideal segue into ASL weather rules to help us prepare to play *Wave upon Wave*.

The breakdown of the supply system and the shortage of adequate clothing during the winter of 1941-42 were the direct outgrowth of German unpreparedness. The extraordinary physical fitness of the Russians, which permitted them to continue the struggle without let-up throughout the biting-cold winter, caused innumerable German casualties and thereby shook the confidence of the troops.

From an ASL point of view, deep snow (E3.73), and extreme winter (E3.74), surfaced in that first winter of 1941-42. In game terms, and in this issue's scenario, those rules invoke the following consequences for infantry and guns (for brevity, we exclude cavalry and vehicle-only consequences).

Deep snow:

Environmental conditions (B25.5) are snow. Brush, marsh, and mudflat are open ground. Streams freeze. Entrenching attempts suffer a +2 penalty. Infantry must pay one extra movement point per elevation change, and ½ movement point extra per hex side crossed, unless entering a building, woods, rubble, or plowed road. The road bonus can only apply along plowed roads. HE attacks against targets in open ground hexes add +1 to their effects dice roll, and their residual firepower slides one column to the left, with notable exceptions for air bursts, mines, and specific collateral attacks. Manhandling dice rolls for gun movement (C10.3) suffer a +3 penalty. Only SMOKE emanating from a blaze or placed entirely within a building can exist. Fire spreads to adjacent hexes only via woods or building hex sides or if a blaze spreads by gusts.

Extreme winter:

Prior to April 1942: the breakdown and destruction numbers (B#/X#) for all Axis weapons, except demo charges, decrease by 2, non-Finish Axis who roll 11 or more on a rally dice roll suffer casualty reduction unless in a building or pillbox. Similar Russian penalties (with the B/X#s dropping by only one point) end as of April, 1941. Regardless of date, no one can entrench.

With those stipulations in mind, give *Wave upon Wave* a try.

New Scenario: *Wave upon Wave*, DCRB 1

Each issue of Red Banner includes one new scenario labeled DCRB for DC Red Banner. This one depicts a “slice” of a larger action described in U.S. Army pamphlet, no. 20-269.

Prelude: East of Toropets, Russia, 16 January, 1942: During the Toropets-Cholm offensive, the German 253rd division, 464th regiment, 2nd battalion, company G settled in to protect the division's supply line through “Village M” against Russian infiltration. To assist, higher headquarters reinforced company G with two heavy machineguns, two 81 mm mortars, and one antitank gun platoon. Around 0800 on the 16th, company observers spotted three Russian columns of troops and anti-tank guns, probably of the Soviet 33rd Army, moving south toward Village M.

Board Configuration: Use board 48. Only rows R-GG are playable. Row GG is the north edge.

Game Length: Play seven game turns. German sets up first. Russian moves first. The Russian wins as soon as he controls at least four buildings.

Order of Battle:

German: ELR 3, SAN 3

Set up in or adjacent to building hexes on or south of row U. The ATG and MRT are NOT emplaced.

1 x 9-1

4 x 4-4-7, 2 x 2-2-8

1 x HMG, 1 x MMG, 1 x LMG, 1 x 81mm MRT, 1 x 37L ATG

8 x ?

Russian: ELR 2, SAN 2

Enter on turn 1 anywhere along the north edge, hex row GG.

1 x 10-0, 2 x 8-0

20 x 4-2-6, 3 x 4-4-7, 2 X 2-2-8

1 x MMG, 2 x 45L ATG

Special Rules:

1. Weather is deep snow (E3.73) and extreme winter (E3.74) with no wind.
2. The Germans can NOT bore sight.
3. Assume that the Russian AT guns both automatically pass their first manhandling roll (to enter the playing area) with a final modified roll of 9.

Aftermath: At 1020 the Russians attacked Village M from the woods 1,000 yards away. Successive waves of about 400 men each tumbled over the three-foot-deep snow to gain 200 yards per assault. German machine guns cut down the first wave, but thereby revealed their own positions to Russian anti-tank guns who took them out even though they shifted position frequently to dodge fire. German riflemen stopped later waves. But, the Russians had moved closer – too close. Exhausted and fearing encirclement, G company destroyed its heavy weapons before fleeing south.

After Action Report: *Conscripts Game Day: December 31 2016*

In this section, we review a scenario (or several) played by our comrades. Thanks to David Garvin for this issue's write up covering DC Conscripts gaming on December 31, 2016.

The DC Conscripts met up for one final go around for the year, this time at Victory Comics in Falls Church. There was a good turnout with four games on the go. I ended up drawing off against Craig Stark in J106 from ASL Journal 7, "Marders not Martyrs." Set in mid-September 1942 just south of Stalingrad in Army Group A, a Soviet attack with some monster heavy tanks is bearing down on the hapless Germans. For this one, the Soviets win immediately upon exiting 17 VP or more off the west edge, and 3 of these VP must be infantry.

Craig's Russians started with 10 first line squads, 2 leaders, an MMG, 2 LMG and a 50 mm mortar. Coming on the board on turn 1 are 4 x KV 1E. To block these forces, I have 5 German first line squads, 2 leaders, an HMG, 2 x LMG and two Marder 1 (f). One of which is commanded by an 8-1 leader.

Craig attempted to use the terrain to his advantage for the infantry, moving them up on my left flank as his heavy tanks would do what they do best: absorb German AP shots and keep on rolling. To counter this, I had my forces laid out in depth with the Marders on the high ground. My Marder with the 8-1 succeeded at its hull down attempt while the other failed. No matter, It's a small vehicle with height advantage. I did give up some ground that was out of LOS due to orchards, but in order to deal with his tanks, I intended on using range and a decent ROF of 2 to put as many shots as possible down range.

My Marders did a fantastic job. As his KVs entered from afar, I took a long range shot and scored a hit on the first KV, maintaining rate. The shot ended up bouncing but my Marder with the leader took a shot (again maintaining rate) and hit, taking out that KV. The next tank came along and my Marder with the leader scored a critical hit and tore it to pieces. With two tanks out of action to start the game, Craig was in a bad spot. His other tanks took the long way around and one ended up in the sights of my Marder with the AFV leader. I scored a hit, but the TK roll missed him by 1. He failed the TC and ended up STUN. He failed to recover, becoming at first UK and then failed that. With one tank left (and most of his infantry), my Marders were free to assist in stopping them. As it turned out, I got another critical hit on his troops in the trees, and the subsequent IFT roll was **another** 2 for a net 5 KIA, I believe. We called it there. My dice were hot and in spite of Craig's use of terrain, I was able to stop the Red Tide.



Craig pondering his attack



The initial setup. Note: only hexes I to GG are in play



A ray of hope for Craig. I repaired it in the next Rally Phase

Some of the other action.



John plotting something mischievous with his Japanese....



Jan getting ready to play test a scenario for the upcoming Journal

DC Conscripts ASL Ladder, 31 December 2016

And we close with club rankings following game day. Many thanks to Jan Spoor for maintaining our ladder.

Name	Rank	Standing
Josef Stalin	Generalissimus Sovetskogo Soyuza	0
James Montgomery	Majór	1
Stephen Frum	Kapitán	2
Bill Stoppel	Starshiy Leytenant	3
Craig Stark	Leytenant	4
John Stadick	Mladshiy Leytenant	5
John Gorkowski	Senior-Praporshchik	6
David Garvin	Praporshchik	7
Paul Washington	Starshina	8
Jason Sadler	Starshiy Serzhant	9
Gary Fortenberry	<i>Sierżant (Armia Polski)</i>	10
Jan Spoor	Starshiy Serzhant	11
Andy Goldin	Efreitor	12
Brian S.	Ryadovóy	13

S novym godom, tovarishchi!

(Happy New Year, comrades!)