

WARGAME FIRST REVIEW

Advanced Squad Leader – Starter Kit #1	★★ 1/2
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Period	WW2	Publisher	Multiman Publishing
Conflict/Battle	Generic	Designer	Ken Dunn
Force Size	~Company	Date	2004/2014
Mvr Units	Section/Half Section	Grid Size	Not stated, c.25m-50m?
DOWNness	2 DOWN	Map Size	Multiples of 15x10 hex
Players	2	Turn Dur.	Not stated, ~ 1 min?
Player Roles	Coy Commanders	Playing Time	~2 hours
BGG Link	https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/9823/advanced-squad-leader-starter-kit-1		

Util – Role	3	Elegance	3	Rules pp	12
Util - Obj	4	Explainability	2	Face Validity	3

Introduction

Subject of the game	WW2 urban combat at Company/platoon level
Scope	Small unit tactics. Scenarios include most of WW2
Components	12pp rules, incl worked examples (complex), 1x double-sided QRS, 2x 2panel isomorphic map sheets
Presentation – Good	Assets all look good but ...
Presentation - Bad	Rules have way too few sub-headings and use terms before defining them, and some key ones not in the glossary. Counters are smaller than standard, and have a lot of text/superscripts on them Uses terms like attacker/defender when it means active/reactive (passive/non-phasing) and DM for Desperation Morale not Dice modifier And so full of acronyms! Uses low is good for most rolls and so negative DMs are good.
Designer's focus/objectives	"simulate any company level ground action from any Theater of WW2!"
Overall system description	Relatively straightforward hex and counter. Units have firepower and uses a 2D CRT of firepower vs 2D6. Not too many DMs. Automatic activation. Mainly 2 step units. Support weapons are separate, uncrewed, counters.
Real Battle Notes	n/a

The Game System

Principal areas of reality represented in the game	Small unit fire and manoeuvre
Important abstractions	- Buildings are more like rocks as give protection from fire, but minimal from assault (just ambush), and in SK have no storeys etc. - SK#1 doesn't even get as far as covering tanks and arty
Types of decisions required	- How to stack or disperse units for max effect - When to switch from fire to assault - Whether to use commanders for +1 fire or to rally units.

Effects of the game system's mechanical requirements on the player's decision making	CRT has 6/8/12/16/20 etc breakpoints, so want stacks to just hit those numbers
How well do game decisions map to real life decisions	Not sure beyond the basics – seems more like pl commander than coy commander – reinforced by number of sgt leaders (or national traits?)
Likes/Good Elements (inc ease of play; really good below)	- Fire is against all units in a hex - Most common result of firing is a morale test
Contributions to the wargaming state of the art	- PP - portage points, essentially encumbrance and movement slows as get encumbered - Colour codes for different counters and when removed and phase wheel – solution to the Disrupted1/2 issue? - Sort of like Residual FP idea, an area that took fire will be risky for whole turn as all action is simultaneous - Broken/DM units in the open try to move/crawl to cover
Deficiencies	- Can fire thru a unit - Too many fire phases, and too intermingled - Swapping out counters for damage - Rout phase before advance/followup - No building TEM in assault (just chance of ambush)! - Not a very bloody cc, mainly stalemate - Large counter and marker stacks – with small counters and small hexes
Improvements? (beyond fixing above)	None
Evaluation of the system's success at achieving the designer's goals	The sales and longevity seem to indicate that people like it. The core firing sequence is very quick and slick, but you do it 8 times a turn! Think it's designed for people who like firing! But otherwise goals not stated.

Overall Evaluation

Evaluation of the player's experience	The 8 firing phases a turn and tracking which phase/acronym/colour you are in does tend to get in the way of any narrative – but might improve with play.
Does the game work? (Veracity/Internal Validity)	It seems to – and longevity suggests it must
Is the game engaging?	OK with simple scenarios, but hate to think what one of the expansions is like – but people play it
Is the game useful – for what?	Not really beyond basic rural F&M.
How valid is the game? Is the game realistic?	Hard to tell. Certainly not for urban, but really need expansions to judge that
Does it provide any special insights	No
Replay value	High given isomorphic maps if you like the system
Who would be most interested in the game?	ASL/WW2/tactical fans
Is the game good value?	Got mine for ~£20 so ok, but £40+ would seem a bit much with no tanks/artillery and only village maps
Overall Impressions	Works OK as a starter kit, and some nice bits to the system but now seems too deep in its own lore to make simpler/more accessible.

Third Party Reviews	Must be way too many out there! But here's 2 at opposite ends of the scale: @Cleitus the Black – “What can I say. After a few initial games, including two solo sessions. I am WOW'ed. The game's mechanics seem so basic (though detailed and involved) that its hard to put my finger on exactly why, but I'll try.” @owenedwards – “It seems a fit time to offer some thoughts about SK1. Those thoughts are: frustrated, engaged, disaffected.”
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Interesting Expansions	Loads on the database, inc for full-fat ASL, and incl urban (esp Stalingrad and Berlin)
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MECHANICS (relative to Urban/PhD)

(include Intricacy of the system, and the mechanical ease of play)

Aspect	Mechanic
Activation/C&C	Automatic IGI-UGO with interrupt
Comms	None
UxV	NA
CEMA	NA
Other ISR	None
Movement	4MP, bonus with leader/road, standard MC per hex based on terrain
Damage	2 step for full section, 1 step for ½ section. “broken” state =~ suppressed
Direct Fire	2D CRT of fire factor vs 2D6, handful of modifiers, range of results from N units killed (all fire vs hex) to pin test. Most common is morale test, but at a variable DM
Assault	Ratio based, roll under a TN to eliminate enemy
Indirect Fire	None in SK#1
IEDs/Engineering	None in SK#1. Have demolition charges treated as a range 1 weapon but must move to place.
Casualties	Just step loss
Logistics	None – not even OOA in SK
Morale	Major part, most frequent fire result is morale test vs unit Morale Factor. If broken (i.e. fail test) first recovery is usually at -4DM, and needs a leader – so many units just end up broken and leaderless
Opinion	None/Na
Victory Condition	Seizure of objectives in time limit
UTZs	Just by map, but only wood and stone in SK, extensions may extend (!)
Building Damage	None in SK
Civilians	None in SK
Subterranean	None in SK
Other Urban Specifics/Notable	Snipers (in main ASL): The other is snipers. Each side gets a sniper activation number and any roll that equals that number activates an enemy sniper

Triad Representation

	Challenges		Solutions	
	Elms	Comment	Elms	Comment
Civilian Population	0	•	0	•
Civilian Infrastructure	0	•	0	•
3D Man-Made Terrain	2	• Morale, and Pinned and DM • LOS	4	• Tanks (in SK #3) • Artillery (in SK #2) • Flamethrowers • Demolition charges

[Per scenario/run through]

Date	13 Aug 26	Scenario	Introductory #1 and #2
Players	DB	Constraints	None

SET-UP

As per standard

HOW IT PLAYED

Scenario 1

- T1
 - Engaging, but US getting into buildings
- T2
 - Cpl Plassman killed, squad reduced
 - US eliminates another GE unit
 - Hard to rally units, and whole of GE E Pl broken, so no rally
 - US Reinf arriving
 - German's culminated, US win

Scenario 2 – Rattenkrieg

- Turn 1
 - Pretty bloody first round of German firing with 3 Sov reduced, and a leader wounded, and Sov hit nothing
 - Sov turn does little but another swathe of cas
 - But just blasting each other either side of the street!
- Turn 2
 - placed a DC but both units survived even though broken!
 - Flame thrower more effective, kills Sgt Evich
 - Only 2 active Soviet stacks left
 - Russians culminated, German win

RESULTS

See above

THOUGHTS (c.f. RL AND URBAN, only for subsequent plays)

Nothing beyond above

IMAGES



Scenario 1 STARTEX



Scenario 1 – end Turn 1



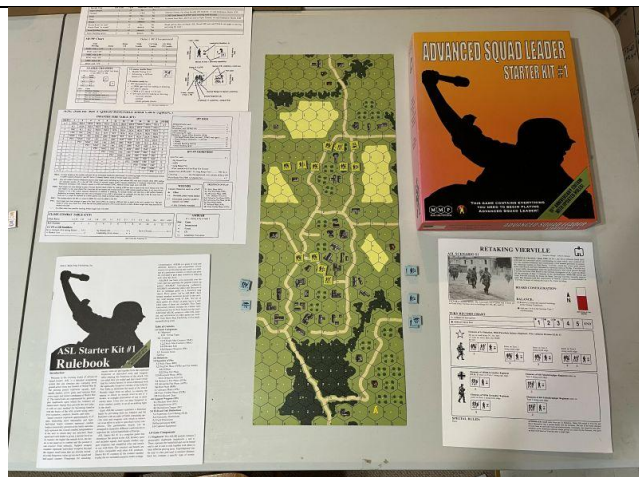
Scenario 1 – End Turn 2/ENDEX



Scenario 2 STARTEX



Scenario 2 – End Turn 2/ENDEX



Full table set up