G44: Abandon Ship!

By Louie Tokarz

SCENARIO BRIEFING

This scenario is by Jeff Cebula, one of the original Chicago ASLers who goes way back to the purple colored *SQUAD LEADER* box and the *GI ANVIL OF DOOM* playtest. Jeff was also the first person I ever played *ASL* against and to this day many of the ideas and ways to go about playtesting I learned directly from Jeff.

I liked "Abandon Ship!" from the start; I prefer scenarios where both sides have to do something. To me there is nothing more boring than playing a static defense scenario, especially if I am the defender and my opponent is sleep-walking through the game (this is something becoming more and more prevalent on the *ASL* tournament scene thanks in part to the internet, where players have virtually an infinite amount of time to study every move—and often bring the same mind set to the face-to-face arena). After two playings of "Abandon Ship!," I knew the Victory Conditions had to be altered. In the original version, the American needed to exit 16 CVP off the west edge. Even though a SSR prevented the Americans from moving west of the roadblock before turn 4, the outcome wasn't even close if the Americans started running 16 points toward the edge on turn 1. In fact, the game boiled down to a fight between the German tanks trying to catch up to the fleeing U.S. squads, with American bazookas trying to stop them. Not much fun. After talking to Jeff and reading about the situation, I changed the VC and gave it another try. The next version looked almost identical to the current VC, except that the Germans only needed to move units west of hexrow J instead of west of the gully. After a few more play-

ings, we changed the VC one more time to the present version. We also changed the order of battle, exchanging a Pz IVJ for a Panther and deleting one concealment counter and one HS from the U.S. side. We played it a few more times and the outcomes were very close.

Since the release of this scenario at a tournament, I have heard that some folks believe that if the Americans just stand their ground they can't be beat. I must disagree. During the playtest, a few people tried to do just that, but ended up losing badly. Such an approach for the American player is a do or die proposition—all it takes is one tank behind U.S. lines to win the game for the Germans. More on strategy later.

AMERICAN ADVANTAGES: 10-2, '45 BAZ, Squad Firepower

BAZ 45
IPP X11
WP6
8-5

The 10-2 leader is the single most important unit in the U.S. OB for this engagement. There will be many ways to use him in this scenario: directing fire from a MMG, directing bazooka fire, routing voluntarily with units that voluntarily break to run away from the German hordes, or placed in a building with a squad for possible street fighting. I am sure you will think of some others of your own, too. Just how you use the 10-2 depends on the tactical situation at hand. His mere presence can be enough to make the Germans reconsider their approach, leaving a cautious German player uneasy and unsure of his troops. The '45 bazookas are the best thing the American has to stop German armor. Keep them in spots where the Germans are likely to traverse when breaking for the U.S. rear area. Although the Germans will eventually outnumber the American squads, the Americans have the big edge in firepower at a range of four or less. Don't get caught in a long-range dual with the Germans during the first two turns.
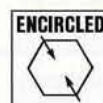
AMERICAN DISADVANTAGES: Squad Range, Fall-Back Defense

ENCIRCLED

Don't shoot it out with the Germans at longer than four hexes, where they will have a better than 2-1 advantage in firepower. One of the most difficult maneuvers in *ASL* is falling back. It takes nerves of steel and good decision-making to pull it off successfully (one of the hardest things for me to learn was when the defender should run instead of fight). Sometimes a beginner will try to fight it out with the attacker when he should instead fall back and make the attacker move into the defending fire. One of the most important things I ever learned from Jeff relates to this subject. In my beginning *ASL* days, it seemed like my troops were always getting cut off and annihilated. Jeff told me that if you are debating about moving back or firing, then you should probably move back. This advice has proven very useful in numerous games.

AMERICAN STRATEGY

There are two ways to approach this scenario as the defender. The GIs can stay and fight it out with the Germans (this takes guts) or they can make a skilled retreat back toward the roadblock, while exiting some troops off the west edge. I like the latter, because I don't trust my luck and I have never seen a successful stand by the Americans.

First off, where does the 10-2 go? I like to start him in the upper level of V3 with a MMG team. This will help keep German infantry from moving down the German right. Extracting these troops from this spot might be a bit tricky if the German decides he would rather kill them than do anything else on turn 1 or 2. Therefore, a BAZ goes in U2. This covers the road, while helping the 10-2 retreat (by firing WP into hex W3, if the bazooka dudes aren't under any Ger-

man guns themselves). There are numerous possibilities for the other MMG, but I like to use it to lay a fire lane on turn 1, either down the road from Y9 (but moving out of this spot could be difficult if the German positions any troops to cut him off) or Z9 (but this offers even worse fall-back possibilities than Y9). Therefore W5 looks like the safest spot if you plan to move back on turn 1. The other three bazookas should be used to cover the obvious tank paths on turns 1 and 2. If you feel adventurous, you could try and place a couple up front to take shots at curious German armor. Remember, though, the Panther is not going to die from a normal bazooka hit on its frontal armor. If the Panther ventures close enough (say about three hexes), try a Deliberate Immobilization shot. I would even sacrifice a half squad (HS) with a bazooka during the prep fire phase, if the German player was kind enough to give me the chance to immobilize the Panther during the first two turns (I wouldn't want him to think I was ungrateful). An immobilized Panther likely would be good for nothing later, after U.S. troops have fallen back to safer pastures.

I like to take two squads and a HS with an 8-0 leader and head for the roadblock on turn 1. Here the squads can start digging foxholes for the end-game defense of the roadblock. After the foxholes are dug, I like to exit the 8-0 and one squad. These units will need to run like the dickens to get off before the German player can get troops to a high enough level to interdict their path off the board, so the extra movement factors the leader provides are crucial to the success of this mission. By exiting these units and maintaining possession of the roadblock, the American obtains a seven-point lead (three EVP plus four for the roadblock). Even if the Germans manage to move one tank past the gully, the Americans still win—provided they maintain control of the roadblock. I believe that maintaining control of the roadblock is essential for the Americans. Don't wait too long to exit the troops. Note that Germans units in U4 at Level 1 or anywhere on the hexrow U ridge line can see the exit hexes, making a nightmare of the exit.

The 60mm MTR can be a very pesky weapon for the Germans to face. I like to move it into hex P7. From there it can greet the Germans as they advance into the woods on the hexrow U ridge line. The MTR can also be placed to cover hexes CC9 and DD8 on turn 1.

The rest of the game amounts to a slow retreat back toward the roadblock. Move back before the Germans move adjacent to your units. Don't be tempted by point-blank prep fire attacks, whether at 12 or 24

(+1). If they fail, so do the Americans. Keep the enemy off your flanks. If the German player can maneuver units into the U4 building early, he puts extreme pressure on the American left flank and makes crossing the T3-T5-R6 street a treacherous affair, not to mention the headache of exiting.

GERMAN ADVANTAGES: Tanks, First-Line Squad Range

The Panther should be used to engage any U.S. strongpoints which may have bazooka support. If possible, stay at least four hexes away from any suspected U.S. bazookas. Barring a lucky hit, this should keep the Panther from falling victim to a Deliberate Immobilization attempt. The ability of the tanks to move quickly around and in back of the American positions should be utilized early and often. This will help keep the American player from solidifying a central position which could prove impossible to break. Use the German range advantage early in the game. If the American wants to stay and fight, he will be at a disadvantage.
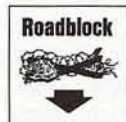
GERMAN DISADVANTAGES: Short-Range Squad Firepower, Roadblock, Time

Limit the close range U.S. firepower advantage by spreading out. There is not much you can do about the roadblock. If you can remove it or clear it, the game is pretty much going your way. If the American stays and slugs it out instead of falling back, take your time and look for an advantage on the flanks. If the American pulls back, be aggressive and try to maintain contact. Not every shot the U.S. player takes is going to hit the mark. The German infantry in this scenario is pretty much expendable. Trade squads to gain ground.

GERMAN STRATEGY

The German player should take a cautious approach on turn 1 in order to position his troops for a turn 2 assault. Don't go running across the board on the first turn in a panic. I have seen some people be *too* aggressive on turn 1 and lose the game before it even gets interesting. The German strategy depends largely on the approach taken by the American player. If the American stays and fights, then the German player can slow down his attack, waiting for the right moment to pounce. However, if the American decides to fall back, the Germans will have to push quickly and try to close with the Americans. After the first U.S. movement phase, enemy strategy should become apparent, and the Germans will be able to put their game plan into action.

On the first turn, movement into the trees in CC9-DD8 will be safe through the path GG10-DD9. Advance into CC9 and DD8. Try not to give the American too many shots on the first turn. Run a few HS to try to reveal U.S. positions and possibly the locations of bazookas. A few dead HS won't weaken the Germans much, and the information gained should be worth the price. Any surviving HS will keep all American units which have first fired from attacking any other German units that are not as close or closer (this is one reason some players hold off firing at scouting HS). I like to position the tanks looking down the road with one pointing at the first level of V3, prepared to smoke any defenders on turn 2. Use the Panther to face off any strong U.S. position, but remember to keep it out of effective Deliberate Immobilization range.

Now, the ball is in the American player's hands. Will he fight or run? Look over the options if he stays and fights. If he has units in Z9, Z10, or Y9, you should do everything to cut off and annihilate them. German units in CC9 and DD8 should help this cause. Next, move to the wall along hex AA10 as soon as possible, preferably with a tank. If the other tanks are sighted on the road, only a very brave American will stick around and fight on the German left. After that, move some units behind the hedge near BB5. From there, the Germans will enjoy a firepower advantage against any units in the wood line centered on W5. If the American has a unit in U2, it is a good possibility that it is a HS with a bazooka. If possible, move a tank to AA2 to meet that challenge. With the Germans in these positions after turn 2, they then will be ready for turns 3 and 4. On turn 4, the Germans want to be in a position to run a tank or two behind the Americans. Because of its small target size, the best tank to use is the JgPz IV. Try to ensure that the American player has multiple decisions to make during his turn 4 defensive fire phase, perhaps allowing the JgPz IV to skate through. Using a Pz IV here to draw American fire or enter a U.S. position to freeze their fire would be a smart sacrifice if the Germans could gain a foothold in building U4. When U4 is in German hands, the American "up front" defense will crumble like a house of cards. That is why it is important to cut off any units around Z9. If the Americans fall back to T6, make sure they won't be able to leave (except to go back into the counter tray). If things have gone well, the German has but to grab the roadblock or move a tank past the gully. I believe that the Americans will need luck to stay and fight successfully.

If the Americans run for it, most of what I wrote above still applies. However, a

good player will force the Germans to move into American fire each movement phase instead of letting the Germans have any decent prep fire opportunities. In this situation, the German must get very aggressive—an intact force at the end of the scenario may show that you are a very decent and moral individual, but you probably have lost. Don't be shy about using your troops. As soon as time permits, move units with the MMG and the 8-1 into Level 1 of building U4, or any other position which has a LOS to the exit hexes. This should put a crimp in the U.S. exit plan.

With the Americans falling back, the Germans will have a better opportunity to attack the roadblock—but against more Americans. If the Germans can move boldly enough, they should keep the Americans from getting too many units back to defend the roadblock. Break them before they get there. Position units to cover the open-ground road hexes, making retreat difficult. If the Germans can hem the Americans inside the village, the chances of taking the roadblock will be increased. Once the battle breaks down to a short-range fire fight, deploy and run HS at the enemy.

FINAL COMMENTS
None of this is easy, but it should be fun. Almost every time I played this scenario during playtesting, the outcome was close. The win-loss records that I have seen for this scenario have been encouraging, and the few times I have played it since its tour- nament release, the games were close. I have won with the Germans twice against people who thought the Americans couldn't lose by staying and fighting. Of the ten scenarios we did for the '96 ASL Open, this one was the most difficult one to fine tune. I think we were successful, which makes all the work worthwhile. Due to the replayability of the fall-back defense, "Abandon Ship!" should be a tournament favorite for years to come. Personally, I would like to see more scenarios like this—where the defender has to do more than set up correctly, and where both the defender and attacker must move to the point of contact.

★

---

planet to start making them. Before the first ships are ready, you've developed six or seven technologies that have made them obsolete. The solution is to re-design the ship in question with the latest technologies, and then tell your fleet advisor to upgrade the ships to the new design plans. This takes considerably less time than building new ships on the new design. Remember when you enter combat that you can't upgrade ships that are blown up. (Also, repair of a damaged ship doesn't cost you anything but time).

Put the best engine, rocket, ECM gear, targeting computer and shield you have in the hull. Then you'll know how much space you have for weapons. Most combat is done with the forward guns (port and starboard guns aren't ideal). At most, put one or two pulse weapons on each side. If you have room, use two or three energy weapons for point defense (these weapons have an extremely limited range). The front guns should never be of a single type. This way your ships will have a nearly constant wave of attack. You should also save room for one (and only one) bombardment weapon for the elimination of enemy colonies.

One oft-used ship design should include a mine sweeper. This saves you from wasting ships blazing a trail through what appears to be empty space. Only one is needed per fleet. Spare space should be given to self-repair technologies.

The exception to these guidelines is the transport hull, which should be used exclusively for colonization (no weapons, armor, targeting computer, shields or ECM gear). Theoretically, you could delegate colonization to a smaller hull and use the transport for combat purposes, but the transport hull gets a 40 per cent penalty to defense, limiting survivability and effectiveness.

ENEMY CONTACT
Politics in the galaxy of *PAX IMPERIA* is surprisingly uni-directional (the game's weakest trait). Treaties can be offered from either side, yours or theirs, but no words are exchanged except to reject or accept the offer. You cannot demand a race to form relations with another. Your knowledge of their relations is limited to observations of who is at war with whom. Declarations of war can be completely unprovoked. Requests for peace come just as suddenly. Your options are limited to getting some friends to help you with trade and research. You are better off finding one such friend early and sticking with him.

Espionage is much more developed. You can sabotage colonies or ships, assassinate and steal (tech, ships or entire planets). Even if you don't have a race designed to spy, this is a very strong tool for weakening the enemy's position before you move in for the kill.

Combat is inevitable and is the main path to victory. Forget capturing colonies; forget surrender. The last sentient being still breathing wins. On rare occasions success is possible when all races are allied and at peace, but don't count on this happening often.

In combat, there is an automatic function that will take over when it is apparent that you are not taking any active part in the fight. It is well suited for colony destruction, as it will proceed slowly through a minefield, blasting mines as it goes. It will proceed to blow away other defenses, and then will atomize the colony. The automated function is less suited for ship-to-ship conflict. There it will approach the enemy fleet and stop at long range to blast away. At this range, pulse weapons are very weak, most energy weapons can't reach at all, and while missiles don't lose effectiveness with range, they reload slowly. Your best option is to take command and tell your fleet to shorten the range. Once there, you can re-engage the automatic function. Of course, variations in fleet composition and weaponry will require you to alter your tactics with the situation.

If you are defending a colony with no fleet in orbit, there is little you can do, other than watch your defenses do their best. Fighter bases are ideal for this job. A fully-built fighter base has three squadrons of the best fighter of each researched type (light, medium and heavy). A partially built fighter base will have proportionally fewer fighters, though always at least one squadron of each type.

By following these suggestions, you will be in a defensible position from which you can experiment, discover and learn on your own. Remember, this is *PAX IMPERIA*, the enforced peace. The best generals will be around to enforce the peace and become the rulers.

★