

Introduction and Pre-Tourney

This is an AAR covering my second tournament attendance (and my first abroad). The Arnhem tournament was first run in 2003, and has attracted a much larger crowd this year (58 in total, I think?) from across Europe and North America. ASLers came from Sweden, Portugal, Canada, the USA, and all points between, it seemed.

Before I get into the details, I'd like to thank several groups. Firstly, the tournament organisers and directors, Peter and Liz Struijf, who also very kindly put me up overnight at their house near Den Haag. Secondly, Hennie van der Salm, whose counters and boards were regularly raided for my games, but who was never less than cheerful. Thirdly, Chris Mazzei, who gave me a lift from Den Haag to Arnhem and also drove me around the Operation Veritable battlefield. And finally, but certainly not least, my opponents, who were all good-humoured, spoke my language better than I did theirs (even the Americans!!!), and made all my games thoroughly enjoyable.

The tournament is based in a hostel on the outskirts of Arnhem. We had two good-sized gaming rooms available for all three days, and I found the accommodation to be beyond my expectations. One particularly nice feature is that everyone can sit and eat their evening meal together, which encourages scenario discussion and socialising.

One thing that surprised a number of us Anglos was the non-acceptance of credit cards in the Netherlands. Although you can use them to withdraw cash from ATMs, they are not generally accepted as direct payment, so if you're intending to travel by train or bus within the Netherlands, make sure you have plenty of cash to start with (or know your PIN!)

Before the tournament kicked off for real on Friday, there was the opportunity to visit the battlefields of Operation Veritable, in particular the Riley's Road, where the fighting between the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry and the Panzer Lehr is depicted in the Operation Veritable Historical Study. I think this was generally very successful. In particular I was very surprised to see just how small an ASL hex is in real life; in general there was

agreement that the level 1 hill on the Riley's Road map is about two centimetres higher than the level 0 terrain.

After we had confused the locals by wandering around pointing at brightly-coloured maps, and checking lines of sight, we all went on to the Netherlands war museum (I forget the exact title) at Overloon, just across the border from Germany. It's somewhat deceptive in size, and contains a very large and labyrinthine indoors section that covers the whole of the war in the Netherlands and major events elsewhere. There are also numerous items of military equipment, mostly British and American, and mostly in the state that they were (presumably) abandoned on the battlefield. Overloon itself was subject to severe fighting and pretty much destroyed by artillery as the British cleared the Germans out in early 1945. There were some unusual items on show, including an Archer and a Challenger, neither of which I had seen before, but I think the most popular was the IS-2 (in front of which there was a group photo).

An excellent day out, and also a reminder of exactly what we depict and re-enact with our bits of coloured cardboard.

On the way back to the hostel, Chris Mazzei was kind enough (despite knowing then that he had to drive home the next day) to take the detour through Nijmegen and Arnhem proper so that we could see the famous bridges. By this time it was the evening rush hour, so we spent quite a lot of time admiring the Dutch road network as we crawled along behind chief navigator Hennie van der Salm, but we travelled across the Nijmegen bridge and then stopped in Arnhem to take photos of John Frost Bridge (as it is now called) from the north bank.

Once we got back to the hostel, it was time for our evening meal, and then down to what we had all come for.

Friendly match (Thursday pm) – Moyland, Bloody Moyland (CH 13)

Having driven through the woods near Schloss Moyland that afternoon, Chris Mazzei and I decided to have a go at this scenario, which

was one of the options in the third round. Although the original was considered to be severely imbalanced in favour of the defending Germans, Peter had included it in the Operation Veritable round as he felt it was an interesting situation to play. However, he had introduced some modifications to help the attacking Canadians, including the ability to set up a further three hexrows closer to the objective. Our game would therefore provide some information as to whether this improved the balance of the game.

I think Chris and I dived for sides; in any case I got to attack as the Canadian. These guys have about six turns to push through half of a board (41, for those playing along at home) and drive the Germans off a level 2 hill, using about a company's worth of infantry, some mortar OBA, two Churchills and three Wasps. By SSR, off-road movement with the AFVs costs an extra MP per hexside crossed (and road movement costs a minimum of one MP), so the Churchills are really limited to the single available road. The Wasps are more mobile, but not their usual nippy selves. As usual, they represent a significant threat with their flamethrower armament and nifty two-hex smoke dischargers, but they are very vulnerable to the German OBA should it get near.

The board is dominated by two features – the wooded hill (in the far-right hand corner as the Canadians attack), and a marshy valley on the centre-left. The road runs around the right of the depression and then angles back toward the centre of the board, passing to the left of the hill. To the left of the road beyond the valley lie some buildings and some grain.

The Canadians face five principal obstacles to their attack. The first is the terrain itself, as the marsh in the valley creates a real bottleneck in the centre of the board. The second is the presence of German OBA, which is a significant threat to the advancing infantry as there is little hard cover to shelter in. Thirdly, the German has two main AT assets in the form of a single PaK 40 and a reinforcing JagdPanther. Fourth, the Germans have also fortified the area, and benefit from some wire, a few minefield factors, and a pillbox. Finally, the Germans have the option to set some units up HIP. Although their infantry firepower is not devastating, they do have a 9-2 leader and a HMG. All this may well explain why the Canadians do not often win.

I felt that I had little option on the attack. This is not a long scenario, and the almost certain presence of HIPsters that must be cleared from the level 2 hill locations means that the main effort must go along the road – moving to the left of the marsh simply takes too long (and is not really a viable option for the Churchills). Therefore, the bulk of the infantry and two of the Wasps were to attack here, with the Churchills providing some supporting smoke cover (by fair means or just by dying!) The third Wasp would attempt to flank the defence with a few squads accompanying it. The Jagdpanther is really only vulnerable to the Wasps unless it is very badly positioned.

Chris' defence made maximal use of the bottleneck, using wire to prevent quick infantry/Wasp movement to the right of the road, mines in the only rally terrain before the wire, and OBA to narrow the 'safe' zone still further. In fact, my attack here went reasonably well, the Churchills using smoke to cover the advance of the infantry, who were able to combine with the OBA to drive the German infantry out of their initial defensive positions. However, my Wasps were a disaster. One was recalled by a sniper on the first turn, while the flanking Wasp broke the flamethrower on the first shot. I was responsible for the third Wasp dying, when I carelessly left it stopped in a hex that turned out to be covered by the PaK 40. Although I think the shot when it came would have hit it had it been in motion, it might well have been the case that the low odds would have dissuaded Chris from taking the shot in the first place.

By turn 4 it was clear that the Canadians really had no chance of winning. Without Wasps, the Jagdpanther was only vulnerable to an infantry attack, and the infantry was too far away from the hill to be able to drive the Germans off (particularly since the German 9-2 was still available to aid the defence).

As a result of this playing, the tournament balance was updated to deny the Germans the use of the HIP units (and an even stronger penalty was suggested), since both Chris and I felt that the scenario continued to be strongly in favour of the Germans. Chris had put together a very strong German defence, and while I would no doubt have benefited greatly from getting more than one Wasp shot off, the bottleneck was very difficult to overcome quickly. Nevertheless, I think this is an interesting scenario with a great deal of potential if the Germans can be tamed a little

(I'd actually consider getting rid of the HIPsters, the German OBA, allowing the Canadians to set up as we played, and making the Churchills unaffected by the slow ground MP cost). In the event, this scenario was played three times at the tournament proper, and the Canadians won all three games. Unfortunately, I didn't get to witness any of those games.

In the end, a fun start to the gaming despite the one-sided result, and it blew away a few of the cobwebs (this being my first ftf game for some three months).

Round 1, Bloody Partisans! (Friday am) Where the Bullet Meets the Bone (FE16)

The draw matched me up against Francois Boudrenghien. Of the three scenarios in the partisan round, we both favoured this. I'm not sure what Francois' reasons were, but I had seen a few playings of Balkan Dawn the night before, and was not impressed. The general consensus was that the Croats in Balkan Dawn were best off making a mass rush off the board as early as possible. A Combat for a Tower looked interesting, but I felt the play would be a little predictable.

Both of us wanted to play the partisans in this, and the dice gave me the choice of taking the Italians, or giving Francois the Italians with the balance (upgrading their MMG to a HMG). In the end I chose the latter as I don't think that it's a big difference. In this scenario, the partisans must attack the Italian garrison of the board 48 X-shaped village. The Italians are of better quality than your usual garrison forces, and have two Lancia armoured cars in support, which boast a hefty 12 MG factors each (8 CMG and 4 RMG). To help the attack, the partisans get two captured Italian tankettes, both of which are deemed to have inexperienced crews, so platoon movement is a must if you want them to get anywhere. To win, the partisans must accumulate plenty of CVP, but every building captured gains them an extra CVP at game end. It seemed to me that the partisans must get both armoured cars, capture at least half of the village, and hope to inflict quite a few casualties or get some prisoners to win.

Francois' setup had the Italians well spread out. One AC was defending near the crossroads, while the other was near the gully. As a result it was difficult for me to identify where the teeth of the defence were. At this point, I made my first mistake of the tournament, as I forgot that SSR makes the grain into brush. Board 48 looks to provide precious little cover when grain is open fields! Curiously, Francois had made a similar error when he first looked at the board, although he thought the grain was ploughed fields, but he caught it before he completed his set up. To his credit, when he saw my forces arrayed for their turn 1 entry avoiding the 'open' ground, he recognised my mistake and graciously pointed it out to me, offering to allow me to reconsider my attack. Thus the tone of the tournament was set!

In the event, I decided to stick with my plan. I felt that even with the brush providing some cover, attacking across the fields was vulnerable to firelanes, and that any broken partisans would have to rout back across the fields to the woods on the very edge of the board. Therefore, the bulk of my force would take the short route to the village, supported by the tankettes, and attack the smaller of the four 'quadrants'. A smaller force of four squads would take the gully route into town and hope to break into the more lightly-defended area and begin to surround the Italians.

Our playing was certainly brutal from the very start. I had some success in the first two turns, pushing the Italians out of the small quadrant and killing the squad manning the HMG in CC, but then I really started to bog down. One tankette was killed by the Italian ATR, while I could not kill the central armoured car (it suffered a shock/UK, but came back to life – my tankette didn't!). In addition, the Italian infantry formed effective firegroups, breaking my infantry regularly and preventing any concentration of force. My gully attackers were also pinned down by the other AC, failing to kill it in CC. By turn 3 it was clear that I was falling behind, and I think I conceded the win in turn 5. My moment of glory was courtesy of my 7-0, who grabbed a DC from a broken squad, charged the centre of the Italian defence, went berserk, headed for the (by then abandoned and immobile) Lancia, was wounded, and finally blew the empty AC up. For me, definitely the best moment of a very fun game against a very good opponent (who was later one roll away from winning the first four games and

meeting the eventual champion, Mel Falk, in the final round).

Francois mounted a very determined but cautious defence, using his firepower advantage to good effect through the use of firegroups that the partisans couldn't match. In retrospect, my plan was flawed, as the small quadrant forced me into a position where I had to cross the street to get further. If I was to play it again, I would attack on a wider front to stretch the Italian defence, and perhaps use the tankettes to drive around the back and try to hurt the Italians through failure to rout. In contrast to our initial feelings, I think both Francois and I finished with the opinion that this was slightly favourable to the Italians, but certainly winnable for the partisans.

I was also interested in the different style that I thought Francois (and many of the other French players) had. I learned my play style from playing Americans and Canadians, and I agreed with the North Americans at the tournament that the Europeans have a more cautious approach to the game. I don't think that it's a major difference, and I'm sure that one approach is not superior to the other.

Round 2, Bagration (Friday pm) The Cat's Lair (OB 13)

In the second round I was matched up against Steve Brasseur, who knew Peter Struijf well from his days in St Louis. Once more, this round presented me with three scenarios that I had never seen. I certainly didn't fancy the Hornet's Nest, which seemed to me to be heavy on fortifications. Hitler's Samurai, my second choice, looked to be rather reliant on the effectiveness of the initial Soviet artillery. I think The Cat's Lair (from HoB's Onslaught to Orsha module) was also Steve's first choice. Hitler's Samurai appeared to be the most popular choice, with The Hornet's Nest coming a good third with one, or perhaps two, playings. This round's games generated a good deal of discussion, and I got the feeling that people were slightly disappointed with Hitler's Samurai.

I also appreciated the fact that these scenarios were larger than average, something that is

often taken out of the tournament setting. I rarely get a chance to play these bigger scenarios face to face because of a lack of time. Personally, I was very happy with our choice. I have absolutely no hesitation in saying that this was the most enjoyable game of ASL that I have played. Both Steve and I had good plans, and we both executed them well (not quite flawlessly, I think, but no major mistakes on either side).

The dice gave me the Germans, since neither of us had a strong preference for one side over the other, so I was tasked with the defence. I confess that after ten minutes of scrutinising the board, I'd placed one foxhole (with some reservations) and a Panther. Ten minutes later, it had clicked, and I had my defence all finished and sorted.

In this scenario, the Soviets must drive the length of a board, capture four multi-hex buildings in a village, and also exit 28 VP off the board out of the village. That village occupies one corner of the playing area, the near-left from the German point of view, and all its buildings have only the ground level. To the right and in front is plenty of open ground and grain. A hill on the far end of the left-hand board gives the Soviets a good vantage point. The far-right corner is screened by an embanked railroad, and the Soviets have the option of setting up in this corner or entering the far edge on turn 1.

In defence, the Germans have three Panthers, reinforced in turn 4 by two Tigers. Infantry is sparse, but of good quality, and is well-armed – plenty of MGs and a FT. The Soviets attack with their usual horde of T-34s (both the 76 and 85 flavours), some SU-85s, lots of good infantry, 70mm OBA, and some trucks, but the pick of their OB is the flamethrowing OT-34/85 (which makes the Crocodile look like a friendly dog, quite frankly). They are also reinforced by three or four IS-2s in turn 4. In many ways, I think this scenario is deceptive. The eye is immediately drawn to the armoured clash, but this is really just a prelude to the vicious infantry fighting in the streets.

The defence has to make some tough initial choices. Hedges and grain limit lines of sight on both boards, so careful positioning of key units (the Panthers and MGs) is vital. The big decision is whether to adopt an initial defence in the open ground and fall back, or whether to begin closer to the village. I found this an easy

choice. The Soviets have plenty of numbers as well as quality, and can also choose where to attack after they look at the defence. The Germans are excellent, but are very few in number. I could see any up-front defence being overrun rapidly by the mass of T-34s; although the Panthers might well cause heavy casualties, there's no easy way to keep them alive as well, and I think you'd have to be a masterful player to pull the infantry back successfully. So my choice was to defend on the edge of town and concede the far half of the board to the Soviets (there's a long hedge that blocks most lines of sight). I think this has two benefits for the German. Firstly, it gives you time to respond to an unexpected line of attack. Secondly, it gives the Panthers the protection of infantry, and the option to pull back into the village where the T-34s will find it much harder to mob them. The big weakness is that the Soviets get to charge across most of the board unscathed, giving them more time to do the business in the village.

Still, from discussing the scenario with others, I know that several players went for an up-front defence and succeeded – so either I know nothing or I'm much worse at coping with that sort of defence than they are (or both!) But all this highlights why I think this scenario is absolutely excellent – it can be played in different ways and presents real challenges to both sides that can be overcome with a bit of skilful play. If one side loses the armoured game, its infantry will find it very hard in their fight, but the tanks alone can't win the scenario.

My defensive plan was relatively simple. The three Panthers set up just outside the town to cover all axes of attack. Although it is impossible (I think) to do this and have them cover each other as well as might be liked, the infantry can protect them with the threat of the 'faust, and they can pull back rapidly into the streets when the T-34s get close. The infantry are also tasked with using those many MGs to lay fire lanes in front of the village. Even if they don't cause many casualties (and they might), you can use them to deny one approach to the Soviets by interlocking them. The mortar is of limited use in this defence, since there are few places from where it can fire, so I placed it out on the flank (unpossessed and unhidden in the hope that it might confuse Steve as to the true positions of my Panthers, although he worked it out well in the event). Its mission was to make the hilltop either smoky or very unpleasant for

the Soviet OBA observer. After initial contact is made, the infantry and tanks will pull back into the village and begin slugging it out at close quarters.

In the end, the plan actually worked pretty well. Steve brought his Soviet horde onto the board in Turn 1, and proceeded to move quickly to the central hedge line. His observer, as expected, climbed the hill. I had positioned a Panther on the board edge, where, although it had limited visibility, it was able to engage the side of the hill that was obscured to the mortar (and also dissuade any attempt to run a few T-34s down the board edge). These two engaged in a little duel, but the greater threat was posed by the mass of tanks attacking along the centre, and my Panther soon disengaged to pull back into the village. In fact, the Soviet OBA was ineffective, being of insufficient calibre to threaten infantry in stone buildings, and the radio broke soon after.

The main Soviet effort came straight down the centre, with a few T-34s and SU-85s moving out to my right. I had been a little concerned at the possibility of being outflanked to the right, and so had stationed the Panther, the mortar, and a MMG out there to cover such a move, but there was no infantry pushing that way, so I was able to pull the MMG back into the village without much of a problem. The mortar was ineffective, managing to get one smoke round onto the hill (just before the radio broke, so utterly pointless in the end), and then breaking while IFing at an approaching SU-85. The main action began in turn 3, and was a little unusual. There was plenty of firing on my part, with the firelanes being laid as planned, but the Soviet infantry proved to be very adept at passing MCs (and the amount of grain around means that there aren't many –2 shots available to get kills). As expected, the tanks came on in an attempt to mob the Panthers, but by the end of Soviet turn 3 both of us had expended plenty of ammunition to absolutely no effect.

At this point I decided that discretion was probably the better part of valour for the Panthers. The one on the right flank stood and shot at the line of Soviets attempting to move around my flank – these were simply too dangerous for me to pull back into the village and allow them a free run around into my backfield (even with the Tigers arriving a turn later). I managed to kill two and also break their supporting infantry, but the Panther fell to a flank shot. On the left flank, my Panther had

pulled back earlier and was out of danger, although this exposed some of my infantry to the OT-34, which promptly killed one and set fire to a victory building. In the centre, my armour leader in his Panther was surrounded by plenty of Soviet tanks, although he had comfortably made it into reverse motion in the Soviet MPH. His initial move left him vulnerable to just one T-34, which managed to miss both the first fire and the intensive fire shot at his side (needing a 9 and then a 8), and he trundled happily back down the street, trusting to that frontal slope for protection. Faced with the encroaching Soviet infantry and the threat of that flamethrower, my infantry pulled back from their front-line positions.

Steve continued his steady advance in turn 4, and killed another infantry squad with the OT-34, which is very able to move around and hit you with a 32 flat shot from 2 hexes, where it is risky to be firing PFs. Much more of this, and I would have very little infantry to hold back the Red tide. However, my Panthers had inflicted four or five kills by now, and I still had two left in commanding positions, well supported by infantry. I continued my localised retreat tactics, using the tried and tested method of making your enemy come to you. My reinforcing Tigers took up positions guarding my flanks at the rearmost victory buildings, ready to abandon if necessary.

In turn 5, the infantry came on, and managed to kill one of my Panthers with a DC, but the constricted terrain within the village made it difficult for the T-34s to do much. In return, I decided that this was the time to stand and fight. I got lucky, to be honest. My 9-2/HMG went on a rate tear and ripped apart the Soviet infantry in the vicinity, and this enabled me to pull back a part of my infantry force to ensure that the victory buildings were covered. I had managed to conserve the greater part of my infantry force, still had the 2 Tigers and the one remaining Panther with the armour leader, and things were looking tough for Steve.

Turn 6 saw the final fling for Steve. Essentially, I just had too many units left for him to wear down in time, and he conceded. It was a fine game that could easily have gone his way had the dice been as favourable to him at crucial points as they had for me, but I don't think either of us deserved to lose. I'd decided on my defensive plan, stuck with it, and made the right move/fire decisions at the important times. I think that if that's the case, it's difficult

for the Soviet to win. On the other hand, if the German player comes up with a weak plan, I think the Soviets have the flexibility and strength to take full advantage. As I said initially, a good scenario, a great game against a great opponent, and my first win on European soil!

Round 3, Op. Veritable at night (Saturday am) – Water Foul (HS 17)

The third round of the tournament gave us a choice between Night and Day scenarios, the idea being that those that weren't comfortable with a night game would not be forced to play one. As it was, I think there were 5 night games being played (out of 23 total in this round), which was nice to see (I'm a big fan of night, and don't think it's as hard rules-wise as some people think, although it's certainly requires a very different approach to play).

I was drawn to play Lars Thuring (of JASL fame). All six possible scenarios in this round were from the Operation Veritable Historical Study, and one of the scenarios I have always wanted to try was Water Foul, where the Canadians must assault a village surrounded by flood waters. I had heard some negative feedback on this scenario, to the extent that the Canadian amphibians were just too hard to hit while in the water, so this was not one of my initial choices. However, Lars has twice played the scenario that was our second choice (if I recall correctly), and I was quite happy to give this a go! Peter Struijf had taken the opportunity to put together some custom maps so that we didn't have to position all of the overlays ourselves, and this was very welcome indeed!

The dice gave me the Germans on the defence once more. They are very brittle in this scenario, being a mixture of second line and conscript units with an ELR of just 1, but the terrain here is very close. The Canadians are high quality, but must control every building on the board to win. With the HIPsters that night provides, and several three-level buildings, there are a lot of locations to clear out.

The bulk of the village is close enough to the board edge that the Canadians can get onto land in turn 1. The big threat that the Canadians have is close combat – elite

concealed squads with leaders will have a big advantage over the German conscripts. I therefore avoided setting up in the buildings overlooking the initial Canadian assault, although I placed dummies there to dissuade them from too rapid an advance. My two key weapons are the MMG, which was positioned to fire down the 'spit' of open ground between the two islands, and the 37mm ATG. This I positioned on the second, much smaller island. The basic idea was to pose enough of a threat to the amphibians to force the Canadians out, where the MMG could do some damage in the open ground. My HIP allocation went on one squad in the building in the smaller island, two half-squads in two of the rearmost buildings on the main island, and a squad with a PSK loitered in the open ground in the centre of the village (PSKs hitting at close range are a very effective weapon indeed).

Lars put most of his attack straight into the buildings at the closest point, as expected. The amphibians are too slow to allow the infantry to get any further than advancing in on the first turn. Another group of amphibians, mainly the unarmoured DUKWs, headed for the open ground spit. I can't remember the details turn by turn. I do know that my first ATG shot brewed up a DUKW, killing (not that I knew it at the time) his best leader, a squad, a HS, and also getting the only DUKW with the HMG. Indeed, my ATG was very effective, killing a couple of Buffaloes as well before the crew broke under infantry fire. Lars' attack was very cautious, keeping concealment where possible and making no rushes. My MMG fire was utterly ineffective, as was most of my fire in the village, although the squad on the second island put down some moderately effective fire on the spit. Lars also used his DUKWs to overrun my ATG crew (before they broke), but to no effect. I was sure that we were getting the rules wrong somewhere, since the DUKWs appear to be far more mobile in shallow water than on open ground, but they did no damage.

In the village, his forces steadily chewed me up, and I could only manage to break the occasional squad. The PSK wielding HIPster had an excellent shot at a nice big adjacent stack, but missed by one (twice!), although they later proved to be very stubborn in CC. Otherwise, I can't see how the German can really stop the attack, since without multi-location firegroups the only way to generate substantial firepower is to risk lots of troops in one Location. The Canadians generally have

plenty of time to grind their way across the island, using half-squads and crews from abandoned Buffaloes to check locations for HIP units as they go. Indeed, Lars should have won this much earlier, but he had atrocious luck with his CC attacks (frequently failing to capture my conscripts). In the end, it came down to the last player turn, with Lars needing to break a few units and kill another in CC to win, which he did successfully.

I was surprised to see that the Germans have won 4 of the 5 reported playings on ROAR, since I think that the Canadians have plenty of time to root out the enemy. I didn't benefit much from the sniper, though, which in this scenario can trigger PF attacks as well as the normal shots, and perhaps that can make a big difference. Nevertheless, a fun little game, which is made tense by the cat and mouse nature of the fighting.

Round 4, Street Fighting (Saturday pm) Dropping Like Flies (DB 011)

The fourth round saw a selection of monsters – one East Front city fight (Bloody Bobruisk, from Onslaught to Orsha, which was very popular), one Italy city fight (The Eternal City, which most people considered to be too long and vehicle heavy), and a PTO city fight (Dropping Like Flies). There were a number of players that had played late the previous night and didn't feel like playing another big game, so they mutually agreed on smaller scenarios.

I was quite keen to try out the PTO fest, Dropping Like Flies, which shows the US Army digging the Japanese out of a town in the Philippines. I've never had the chance to play a big 'bughunt' before, so I thought this might be interesting. My opponent was Lee Conner, from the US, who took the Japanese on the defence (we decided that the game would probably be better if I had the US as the least experienced in this situation).

The scenario itself is not particularly unit-heavy, but it does have several unusual SSRs that complicate play, along with the extra time required to deal with all of the Japanese HIP fortifications and units. As well as some good

quality infantry, the Japanese get some mines, wire, roadblocks, and armoured cupolas (the SSRs aren't entirely clear, but we understood that these are in fact dug-in tanks and played them as such), some pillboxes (which must be occupied by Guns), booby-traps and the usual DC and TH Heroes. To dig them out, the US get some mixed quality infantry (from 747snd down to liners), four Shermans, and some 100mm OBA. The 747s are combat engineers and have a FT and some DCs.

To win, the US must capture more than half of the multi-hex buildings in the Japanese set-up area, with the two forces able to set up near to each other. I opted to attack all along the line, driving most of my force through an area of jungle to the urban area, while my 9-2 leader set up with a death-star (3 666 squads, 2 HMGs, and a .50 cal). I exchanged my 3 60mm mortars for the optional OBA module, with the intention of bringing down WP to cover the attack and reveal HIP units, but I broke the radio with the very first contact roll of the game and never repaired it. As permitted by SSR, the 100mm OBA dropped a barrage into the edge of the town straight away, which came as a bit of a surprise to Lee who had never encountered barrages before.

However, my attack plan was flawed. Never having done this before, I underestimated the sheer amount of units and firepower needed to push the Japanese back, and my infantry attack made slow progress. In one corner is a cathedral, with a steeple, two factory hexes, and a SSR balcony Location between the steeple and the ground floor in one of the factory hexes. This building was occupied by a 2nd-line squad in the 'factory' and a crew with a HMG in the steeple. After four turns, I still hadn't dug the crew out, finding them difficult to kill with FP, and unable to overwhelm them in CC thanks to the stacking limit of the steeple.

My Shermans also went down quickly. One managed to find the hidden DC hero with his large bomb in the road, the first time Lee had ever pulled that one off successfully. Two others, including the 105mm with the big canister firepower, exposed themselves unwittingly to side-shots from the hidden cupolas, both of which hit and killed with their first shot. My deathstar was moderately effective to start with, but then a 6-flat shot from his HMG/leader combination broke my leader and a squad. The next shot, using rate,

killed the leader, broke the other two squads, and CRd the broken squad! The Force was with the IJA there!

Lee set up a very effective defence. His right is covered by a flooded stream, and he used wire covered by machine-guns and his 105mm howitzer to extend it. Beyond the wire were some minefields, followed by jungle hexes covered by his mortars. As a result, whenever my infantry got to a position from where they could fire on the Japanese, they were very exposed in turn. Where I had decent cover, Lee kept his guys concealed and rotated them around so that I could rarely get clean shots or risk going into CC.

It was evident from about turn 2 that I wasn't going to be able to win this game. In retrospect, it was clear that I needed to concentrate my attack and punch through his lines, but nowhere had I attacked in sufficient strength to be able to do this. Still, we played out about 4 turns and had a blast before I conceded so that we could get some sleep. It's a fun scenario, with plenty going on, although I think the SSRs are probably excessive and lead to some rules questions (for example, how do you treat a factory hex with a steeple, an inherent staircase, and a balcony location? Is this a vehicular-sized entrance? Does the balcony have a +1 or +3 TEM?).

Round 5, Attack! Counterattack! (Sunday) – First and Inches (PBP 25)

On Sunday morning, I was paired up with Bernardo Pignatelli, one of the Portuguese players. He had never played vehicles before this tournament, and had less than 10 games in total under his belt, I think. We opted for this scenario from the Paddington Bears, which came with a good reputation. The other possibilities I felt were less suitable for him, Cattern's Position (PTO) and South Park (slopes, snow, and unusual vehicles).

Bernardo wanted to take the defending side, although in this round everyone gets to attack. This gave him the US, who start in a very disadvantageous position in the village, but have strong reinforcements entering in turn 2. As the Germans, I got to attack with some good infantry (although by tournament SSR

these did not have the increased SS broken morale), two StuG IIIs, and a Wirbelwind. I had to get 23 victory points, getting one for every controlled stone building adjacent to a road at the end of each Game Turn.

The US have only one bazooka to start the game, so it is potentially possible to run tanks past at high speed. With limited infantry firepower, there is the possibility of opening up one flank by using the Wirbelwind's massive firepower in bounding first fire, and running StuGs with riders past to grab buildings deep in the board. But I felt this was risky, and decided on a more conventional attack. One StuG went out to the left, where it could deter any attempt by the American reinforcements to hit me there. The other went into the town, to find a good overwatch location to command the centre and road approaches.

As expected, Bernardo's defence took a pounding in the first three player turns. The Wirbelwind was effectively able to drive up nice and close to the Americans and pour firepower into their positions. Meanwhile, I did my best to avoid the 9-1 leader with his MMG, and picked on the more vulnerable squads, managing to break and capture the 8-0 with a squad, and another HS, in the centre of the board. By the time the US reinforcements arrived, I had my StuGs in position, with a strong position on my right (one StuG and the 9-1/MMG covering the roads into the position, and another two squads with one PSK in the woods nearby). Bernardo had formed a mini-death-star with his 9-1, the MMG and two squads, which were harassing my efforts to take up a good position in the centre, while a very stubborn squad held onto a stone building on the left. At this point I had control of five victory buildings, with 9 of the 23 VPs needed for victory, thanks to one second-line squad that had run into the US backfield to grab buildings.

Bernardo counterattacked into the village directly, but was pretty cautious. He had some early success, as I lost one leader to a sniper, and then another to the dreaded HoB/hero/wound/death combination. That left only the 9-1 on the right flank, and I felt that my central and left positions would collapse if pushed hard. However, I think Bernardo was possibly too concerned about the threat of PFs, and simply moved to contact on that side of the board.

With only 14 more VPs needed in the remaining four turns, Bernardo had to attack quickly in turn

3. I maintained my positions, not wishing to expose myself to US firepower, but shifted the left-flank StuG to a position where it was threatening to run into Bernardo's rear.

Bernardo responded with a very nice little attack on my Wirbelwind, driving up with one M-36, killing it with BFF, and then driving back to cover against the threatening StuG. On my right, he pushed infantry through the woods towards my strong position, and tried to tempt me into taking out one of his halftracks with my StuG (well, I did, but only once he'd finished moving). He also bushwhacked one of my squads in the woods on the right by rolling snakes in CC. However, his infantry were unable to recapture more than the single victory building in his half of the board, and I ended turn 3 with 14 VPs, just nine short of victory.

In turn 4 I had to take one of those game-turning decisions on my right flank. There was plenty of US infantry homing in on me, and a serious threat that the Hellcat would drive around the back to encircle me and possibly take the StuG out from behind. I decided to hedge my bets, leave the StuG where it was, but pull some infantry back to present the PF threat.

But before I did that, I inflicted one of those PMC moments on poor Bernardo. Having already hit him with two long shots on close LOS, my little half-squad in the centre decided to practice with this funny American panzerschreck that they'd found lying around. They'd already taken one shot at the Jackson that killed the Wirbelwind (but missed); but now they put a round squarely into the Hellcat. That one low roll changed the whole situation, since now the StuG wasn't threatened with a rear shot. Inspired, it proceeded to slam some HE into the GIs in the woods, breaking them. The infantry joined in, and by the end of my player turn the game looked very different indeed.

At this point, time was beginning to run short, and Bernardo had to get back to Portugal, so he conceded. It didn't seem particularly likely that the US could grab back more than one (at the most) victory building in his player turn, which would leave me needing just 5 more VP with two turns to go, and holding four buildings. His Jacksons were in a stand-off with my

StuGs, with him needing to move first, and a fair proportion of his infantry was broken.

However, it must be said that he played very well for someone still getting used to vehicles. He picked up the concepts of bounding first fire very quickly and used them to good effect, but was probably too conservative at a time when a solid push would probably have posed a serious threat to my position without incurring too many casualties.

Final Summary

Well, I went 2 and 3 at the tournament proper, which was pretty much in line with my expectations. More importantly, I played some excellent scenarios against some great opponents, and I met a lot of really nice ASLers. I'll be doing my best to come back next year!