

Re-Retaking Vierville

AAR: ASL SK#1 Scenario 1: "Retaking Vierville" by Andrew Swan

In an ongoing attempt to recoup my gaming investment (yeah, right), I've been getting back into this relatively complex but rewarding game. My opponent Phil (<http://www.boardgamegeek.com/user/sbszine>) and I had played this scenario once before, and true to the ROAR stats (<http://www.jrvdev.com/roar/VER1/ShowScenario.asp?ScenarioID=...>), I won comfortably as the GIs. I was looking forward to playing as the underdog Jerries.

As I see it, the Germans face several tactical problems:

- the US get more squads
- the US squads have more firepower (7 vs. 4 or 5)
- most of the German units enter from the east edge, with no obvious route to the victory buildings (VBs)
- to win, the German units have to remain in good order; this means that even if the Germans occupy the VBs, it's to no avail if the Americans can put those hexes into melée on their last turn

On the plus side for the Germans:

- some of their units have better morale and/or range than the Amis
- they can enter the map closer to the VBs than the Amis
- all the US reinforcements have to cross several hexes of open ground in the north

Once Phil had set up his initial units, I deployed my off-board forces as two task forces:

- Kampfgruppe "Speed Hump" consisted of three unled squads, tasked with slowing down the flood of US reinforcements that come from the north in the first three turns. They would do this by denying them free use of the abovementioned open ground by occupying the stone buildings Q6, R7, and U3 and "skulking" out of them when possible.
- Kampfgruppe "Turtle" was the remaining German OB (including the turn 2 & 3 reinforcements), with the job of taking and holding as many of the four victory buildings as possible against any Ami units that made it there before the end of the scenario.

To begin with, the plan worked well; my three delaying squads were able to slow down the huge stacks of Amis quite effectively, helped by Phil's tactic of moving them as stacks in order to gain the leader movement bonus. One of his stacks even detoured from their main line of advance to assault the U3 building, which although it meant the death of some loyal Nazis, also worked in favour of my delaying tactics.

Back in downtown Vierville, my main force had successfully evicted the initial American force from most of the VBs (except for a 7-3-7/3-3-7 stack in M4 that had reached a standoff with my two 4-4-7s in K4).

By about turn 4, the north of the map was littered with broken squads, some German but many more American. Things were looking good for the Fallschirmjäger and their lesser Wehrmacht comrades lodged in the VBs.

Eventually however, a couple of leaderless 7-4-7s managed to survive enough defensive fire to work their way into CC with my main force. Those 5 FP of advancing fire are murderous, especially at point-blank range! Things were looking tight, but with a sizeable German stack

in N6 (3 x 5-4-8s, an 8-1, and an 8-0), I was confident that I could at least hold onto that hex and win the scenario.

On the very last turn, Phil advanced a single 7-4-7 into that hex for a last-ditch effort. It didn't matter if he killed or reduced a few of my units, as long as I killed him and prevented a melee. At odds of 17-7 I had reason to be hopeful, alas the dice failed me at this crucial time. The gutsy 7-4-7 lived (hopefully to die another day, grrr), the hex stayed in melee, and I lost the game. It all came down to the final phase of the final turn. Phew!

As an exercise, I recorded the rolls we made during the game, to see if our perceptions of each other's luck matched the reality. Here are the stats:

	Me	Phil	Highlights
Avg. DR	7.0 (70)	7.4 (104)	Phil's 7 boxcars vs. my one
Avg. dr	4.0 (7)	3.6 (9)	4 of my 7 dr's were 5's!

All in all, a fun scenario that we agree has plenty of replay value, even if it's slightly biased in favour of the Yanks.

Phil:

This was my third game of scenario 1, and my second as the mighty USians. Due to the confusing layout of Andrew's many tackle boxes etc I was unable to use the lucky Kevin Moody counter from SK2 as my leader, but I otherwise felt confident, since the scenario is famed as a walkover for the seppos.

Before the game began we tried to even the odds a bit by coming up with a good strategy for the Axis. We both agreed that CXing a squad from the east road into the buildings while leaving some troops in the north to pin USian reinforcements seemed like the way to go. In the actual game Andrew brought troops from the southeast (through cover) rather than east (over open ground), which I think was a bit conservative.

My major error was running my reinforcements from the north as a stack, rather than sending some guys ahead of the main force to draw fire and lay smoke. (I'd been turned off smoke in the previous game when, as the Germans, I failed to generate even a teeny wisp thereof... all those Essen reports of Germans smoking had misled me). I suspect that individual MMCs running through residual fire might be better off than a whole stack taking a hit with a leader present. You'd need some lucky rolls in succession, but at least all of your eggs wouldn't be in one basket.

This was my first experience of close combat in ASL. The difference between close combat and directed small arms fire in ASL is interesting, and in my opinion serves as a template for good CRT design. In a game with gunpowder weapons (say Napoleonics or later), it's

arguable that attacker:defender ratio has little impact on damage. And indeed this is the way that ASL (not to mention Wilderness War etc) handle firearms: the damage is basically the amount of firepower modified by fog and friction. When you switch to close combat (hand to hand and ad hoc / undirected small arms fire), a traditional ratio-based CRT makes sense.

So with that in mind it was a bit of a Pyhrric victory for the yanks (and in a game like EastFront this kind of result would've been a loss for me by VPs). The dice were fairly consistent, so Andrew's superior strategy should've won out, but a combination of a some good rolls at the end (when I really needed them) and the toughness of my little green men won me the day.