

Squad Leader

Rules of Play · Version 1.0.0

Men break long before they die. An officer is the only thing that gets them up again. Everything else in this manual follows from those two sentences.

This is a squad-level tactical wargame for one player against the machine. Three actions are fought over four printed geomorphic boards, in an eight-phase turn, with an umpire's slip written up for every volley. It runs entirely in a browser, makes no network requests of any kind, and collects no personal data.

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1. The idea

A squad is not destroyed by fire. It is put on the ground by it. Most of what happens in this game is men being pinned, broken and driven back, and the currency of the whole thing is not casualties but nerve.

A broken body cannot fire, runs for the rear of its own accord, may be shot at while it crosses open ground, surrenders if it is surrounded, and pays the enemy a share of its worth for every turn it stays broken. Two squads broken are worth more to the enemy than one squad killed.

The only thing that reverses it is an officer. He takes his grade off the fire he directs, he lets bodies in different hexes fire as one command, and he is the difference between a broken squad getting up and scattering for good. He is also the easiest counter on the board to lose. That tension — the officer must be forward to be useful and is safest behind — is the game.

2. Sequence of play

Each side takes a turn of eight phases. You give orders in your own turn, and again in the enemy's defensive fire phase.

PHASE	WHOSE	WHAT HAPPENS
Rally	yours	Broken and pinned bodies try to come back in hand. An officer in the hex or within call is the whole difference.
Preparatory fire	yours	Bodies that have not moved may fire at full weight. Firing gives up the movement phase for that body.
Movement	yours	Move what you mean to move.
Defensive fire	theirs	The other side fires at your men while they are crossing. In the enemy's turn, this phase is yours.
Assault fire	yours	Bodies that moved a short way may fire, at half weight.
Rout	umpire	Broken bodies run, away from whatever broke them, and may be interdicted crossing open ground.
Advance	yours	One hex, into contact if you want it.
Close quarters	umpire	Anyone sharing a hex with the enemy fights it out.

Phases in which you have nothing to do are passed over without asking you. Rout and close quarters are worked by the umpire; you do not order them.

3. The ground

The boards are printed and fixed, not generated. Every player fights the same ground, which is what makes the par table in section 10 mean anything. Four boards are stacked two deep to make each action's sheet.

Cover has to be got into

A body that has moved this turn takes only half the cover of the hex it is standing in, rounded down, and is always counted as caught crossing. Walking into a wood in front of a machine gun is not a way of becoming safe; it takes the rest of the turn to get down into it.

If you are attacking, cross in one bound and cross behind smoke. If you are holding, the defensive fire phase is when your fire is worth most — measured at roughly twice a preparatory shot once

this rule is in force.

Terrain

GROUND	COVER	FOOT	TRACKS	LEVEL	BLOCKS
Open ground	—	1	1	—	—
Road	—	1	1	—	—
Standing grain	+1	2	2	—	—
Scrub	+1	2	2	—	—
Orchard	+1	2	2	—	—
Woods	+2	2	4	—	yes
Rubble	+2	2	4	—	yes
Wooden building	+2	2	—	—	yes
Stone building	+3	2	—	—	yes
Factory hall	+3	2	—	—	yes
Crest	—	2	2	+1	—
Gully	+1	2	3	-1	—
Rail embankment	+1	2	3	+1	—
Marsh	—	3	—	—	—
Wall line	+2	2	3	—	—
Trench	+3	2	3	—	—

COVER is added to the fire roll against anything in the hex, so a higher number is better for the man standing there. FOOT and TRACKS are the movement cost; a dash under TRACKS means the hex is closed to vehicles. BLOCKS means a line of sight cannot be traced through the hex.

4. Bodies and counters

A counter carries an abbreviation and three numbers. For men these are firepower, range and morale: firepower counts whole out to the range printed and half again to twice it. For an officer the strip is his bonus and his morale. For a vehicle it is the gun's armour-piercing power, its front plate and its high-explosive weight.

A hex holds at most three bodies of one side. A shaded counter has fired this turn; one printed BROKEN or PINNED is in the state named; a bar along the foot means dug in.

German

ON THE COUNTER	WHAT IT IS	FIREPOWER	RANGE	MORALE	CLOSE	POINTS
PzGr	Panzergrenadier squad	6	4	8	4	20
Gren	Grenadier squad	4	5	7	4	16
Pion	Pionier squad	5	3	8	5	22
PzGr½	Panzergrenadier half-squad	3	3	7	2	10
Gren½	Grenadier half-squad	2	4	6	2	8
Pion½	Pionier half-squad	2	2	7	3	11
Hptm	Hauptmann	−3 bonus	—	9	1	26
Lt	Leutnant	−2 bonus	—	8	1	18
Fw	Feldwebel	−1 bonus	—	8	1	12
Crew	Gun crew	1	2	7	2	6

Soviet

ON THE COUNTER	WHAT IT IS	FIREPOWER	RANGE	MORALE	CLOSE	POINTS
Gds	Guards rifle squad	5	4	8	4	19
Rifle	Rifle squad	4	4	7	4	15
SMG	SMG squad	8	2	7	5	18
Consc	Conscript squad	3	3	6	3	10
Gds½	Guards half-squad	3	3	7	2	10
Rifle½	Rifle half-squad	2	3	6	2	8
SMG½	SMG half-squad	4	1	6	3	9
Consc½	Conscript half-squad	2	2	5	2	5
Kpt	Kapitan	−3 bonus	—	9	1	26
Lt	Leytenant	−2 bonus	—	8	1	18
Srzh	Serzhant	−1 bonus	—	7	1	11
Pol	Politrak	−1 bonus	—	8	1	20
Crew	Gun crew	1	2	6	2	6

Support weapons

ON THE SLIP	WHAT IT IS	FIREPOWER	RANGE	NOTES
LMG	Light machine gun	3	8	—
MMG	Medium machine gun	5	12	—
HMG	Heavy machine gun	8	16	—
LMTR	Light mortar	3	11	indirect, smoke
mMTR	Medium mortar	6	18	indirect, smoke
ATR	Anti-tank rifle	1	6	AP 5
FAUST	Panzerfaust	—	2	AP 16
DEMO	Demolition charge	14	1	AP 14
FT	Flamethrower	12	2	AP 10, 3 shots
PaK	5cm anti-tank gun	4	14	AP 11
45mm	45mm anti-tank gun	3	14	AP 9

A support weapon is carried by the body holding it and appears on the slip as its own line. A broken body may drop what it is carrying.

Vehicles

COUNTER	WHAT IT IS	AP	HE	GUN RANGE	PLATE F/S/R	MOUNT	POINTS
StuG	Sturmgeschütz III	15	8	20	12 / 5 / 4	casemate	46
PzIV	Panzer IV	14	8	20	10 / 4 / 3	turret	44
251	Sd.Kfz.251	—	—	—	3 / 2 / 2	casemate	20
T-34	T-34/76	15	8	20	12 / 7 / 5	turret	48
T-70	T-70	8	4	14	6 / 3 / 2	turret	24
SU-76	SU-76	12	7	20	5 / 3 / 2	casemate	30

A casemate gun must face its target; a turret need not. Plate is compared against the aspect actually presented. A dash means the vehicle mounts no gun of that kind – the Sd.Kfz.251 is a carrier with a machine gun, not a fighting vehicle, and is open-topped, which means the infantry fire table applies to it.

5. Fire and the slip

Select a body, then tap an enemy hex. The slip fills in and is marked DRAFT. Nothing has happened yet: you can read it and put the shot down again. This is the whole point of it.

What the slip says

THE LINE	WHAT IT MEANS
Each weapon	Every weapon that contributes and at what weight. A squad past its printed range counts for half; a machine gun reaches where the rifles do not.
Firepower on the hex	The sum, and the column of the fire table it falls in.
Each modifier, by name	Cover, level, the officer directing, smoke, whether the target was caught crossing, and so on. A negative modifier helps the firer.
Modifiers	The total added to the dice.
The bar	What that column actually pays: how often the shot does nothing, shakes them, breaks them, or takes men out.
The dice	Two six-sided dice, shown as pips, with the modified roll beside them.
The verdict	The code from the table and what it means in plain English.

Firing as one command

Bodies in one hex always fire together. Bodies in different hexes may only fire as one command when an officer's voice reaches all of them. Because the fire table is not linear, one big column is worth a great deal more than two small ones — which is most of what an officer is for.

Reading the fire table

The table is read by column (firepower) and row (the modified roll). Lower is better for the firer. NE is no effect; PTC and NMC are morale checks of increasing severity; 1MC and 2MC are worse again; K/1, K/2 and K/3 take men out and check the rest; KIA removes the body.

ROLL	1	2	3	4	6	8	12	16	20	24	30	36
2	1MC	2MC	K/1	K/1	K/2	K/2	KIA	KIA	KIA	KIA	KIA	KIA
3	NMC	1MC	2MC	2MC	K/1	K/1	K/2	K/2	KIA	KIA	KIA	KIA
4	PTC	NMC	1MC	1MC	2MC	2MC	K/1	K/2	K/2	K/3	KIA	KIA
5	PTC	PTC	NMC	NMC	1MC	2MC	2MC	K/1	K/2	K/2	K/3	K/3
6	NE	PTC	PTC	NMC	NMC	1MC	2MC	2MC	K/1	K/2	K/2	K/3
7	NE	NE	PTC	PTC	NMC	NMC	1MC	2MC	2MC	K/1	K/2	K/2
8	NE	NE	NE	PTC	PTC	NMC	NMC	1MC	2MC	2MC	K/1	K/2
9	NE	NE	NE	NE	PTC	PTC	NMC	NMC	1MC	2MC	2MC	K/1
10	NE	NE	NE	NE	NE	PTC	PTC	NMC	NMC	1MC	2MC	2MC
11	NE	NE	NE	NE	NE	NE	PTC	PTC	NMC	NMC	1MC	2MC
12	NE	NE	NE	NE	NE	NE	NE	PTC	PTC	NMC	NMC	1MC

Columns are firepower on the hex; rows are the roll after modifiers. The table is monotone in both directions: more firepower never gives a worse result, and a lower roll never gives a worse result.

6. Morale, rally and rout

A morale check is two dice against the body's morale, modified by the severity of the result and by any officer present. Failing it pins the body; failing it badly breaks it. A body already broken does not break again — men already running have nowhere further to fall — it takes a casualty instead.

Broken

- It cannot fire and it cannot be ordered to move.
- It runs in the rout phase, away from whatever broke it.
- It may be interdicted — shot at — while it crosses open ground.
- If it is surrounded when it tries to run, it surrenders.
- It pays the enemy a share of its worth for every half-turn it stays broken.

Rally

In the rally phase, select a broken or pinned body and give the order. Alone, the men must find their own courage, and usually do not. With an officer in the hex they usually do; a commissar adds his own weight to it. A bad enough failure and they scatter and are gone.

So an officer's second job is to go and get them. He is the last counter you can afford to lose, and the men round him stop being a company when he goes.

7. Armour

Gunnery is resolved on its own, not on the fire table. Select a vehicle, tap an enemy vehicle, and choose the gun. Three things decide it:

- Facing. Front, side and rear plate are different numbers. Manoeuvre for the flank.
- Range. The punch falls off by one for every four hexes.
- What happens when it goes through. She may burn; or the crew may get out, in which case they are a shaken crew counter in the hex and the vehicle is worth only part of its value to you. A shot that exactly equals the plate may fail the weld.

A shot that does not go through may still shock the crew, which costs them their next action. Small arms never open a closed vehicle — the fire rattles off the plate. An open-topped vehicle is another matter and is subject to the infantry fire table like men. At one hex, infantry may kill a tank with a panzerfaust, a demolition charge or a flamethrower.

8. Smoke and observed fire

A mortar or a vehicle carrying smoke may lay a screen. Lay it on the ground your men have to cross, not on the enemy. A screen blinds both sides equally, so smoke put on the enemy protects him: it reduces the total damage done, and less damage favours whoever already holds the ground.

A mortar may also engage what somebody else in the command can see, without seeing it itself. Indirect weapons have a minimum range and cannot drop their rounds on a hex under their own muzzle.

9. Close quarters

Advancing into a hex the enemy holds means close quarters, resolved in the last phase of the turn on an odds ratio of the weights present. Broken men count for very little. A hex will hold no more than three bodies of one side, so numbers can be brought to bear only so fast.

10. Scoring and par

Both sides are scored out of a thousand.

POOL	WORTH	HOW IT IS PAID
Casualties	600	Your share of what the enemy started with, taken out of him. A broken enemy counts at a fraction of his worth for as long as he stays broken.
Ground, running	200	Paid out over the action, every half-turn, for the objectives you hold at that moment.
Ground, final	200	Paid at the close for the objectives you hold then.

Because the running pool is paid continuously, holding an objective early is worth real points even if you lose it later — and taking one on the last turn is worth much less than taking it on the third.

Par

In an assault the defender out-scores the attacker by design, so comparing the two scores tells you nothing. Instead your score is read against par: the mean of an ace-against-ace sweep of thirty-six actions on the same ground, holding the same command.

ACTION	GERMAN PAR	SOVIET PAR
The Rail Halt	488	431
Cellar by Cellar	369	401
Vanya's Rise	490	557

AGAINST PAR	VERDICT
+120 or better	A model action
+55	Better than the staff expected
−15	About what the ground was worth
−80	Short of what was asked
below that	A costly failure

A single action swings a long way on the dice — a standard deviation of roughly 140 points on Cellar by Cellar and 230 on Vanya's Rise. That is why the verdict is a band and not a number, and why one bad action proves nothing.

11. The actions

The Rail Halt

Sixteen September. A Grenadier company is put at a branch-line halt held by a scratch garrison. There is a kilometre of standing grain to cross and no armour on either side.

Boards	The Rail Halt and Sokolov Farm
Length	6 turns
Attacking	German
Objectives	The station block (40%), The goods shed (35%), The rubble siding (25%)

Cellar by Cellar

The tractor works has changed hands twice. A Guards battalion goes back in at first light, up the tram road and through the yard wall, against Grenadiers who have had a night to prepare.

Boards	The Tractor Works and The Rail Halt
Length	7 turns
Attacking	Soviet
Objectives	No.1 shop (35%), No.2 shop (35%), The office block (30%)

Vanya's Rise

The rise carries the only view of the farm road for three kilometres. Panzergrenadiers with two vehicles in support are to take it off a rifle company that has dug the crown.

Boards	Vanya's Rise and Sokolov Farm
Length	7 turns
Attacking	German
Objectives	The crown (45%), The shepherd's hut (30%), The wooded shoulder (25%)

12. Tables

The terrain table is in section 3, the unit, weapon and vehicle tables in section 4, the infantry fire table in section 5, and the scoring and par tables in section 10. Every one of them is read directly out of the game's own data when this manual is generated, so it cannot drift from the rules it documents.

13. The machine officer

The opposition comes at three grades. They differ in exactly three things, and those three were kept because they were measured to matter.

WHAT HE DOES	GREEN	REGULAR	VETERAN
How close to the best move he will settle for — a green officer accepts anything within a wide band of it	wide	narrow	the best
What he pays for ground he can shoot from	little	more	most
How hard he works to fire as one command	little	more	most

Two things are the same for every grade

Whether to keep a volley back, and how far an officer will go to collect men who have run, were each measured over several thousand machine-against-machine actions, played in pairs with the commanders swapped between seats. Neither separated a good officer from a bad one: every margin sat inside its own standard error. They are therefore doctrine, held at one value for every grade, rather than talent.

This is stated rather than hidden because a knob fitted to noise is worse than no knob. The skill ladder that remains is monotone on all three actions.

14. Saving, options and storage

- The game saves itself at the start of every phase you are given. Menu saves and returns to the title screen; Resume picks it up.
- Storage is probed before use. A browser that refuses it says so on the title screen and plays perfectly well without remembering.
- Keys used: `tronsoft_squad_leader_save` and `tronsoft_squad_leader_prefs`. Nothing else is read or written.
- `#seed=1977` in the address bar pins the shuffle so an action can be replayed exactly.
- `#fast=1` skips the pause the machine takes over its own orders.
- The game makes no network requests of any kind and collects no personal data.

Squad Leader is a board wargame designed by John Hill and published by The Avalon Hill Game Company in 1977, winner of the Charles S. Roberts Award for Best Tactical Game of 1977 and the ancestor of Advanced Squad Leader. This package is an independent browser game inspired by that subject and period and is not published by, endorsed by, licensed by or affiliated with Avalon Hill, Hasbro, Multi-Man Publishing or any successor in title. No code, art, rules text, tables, mapboards, scenarios or counters from any published edition were used in making it. See LICENSE.txt for the full disclosure.

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