

Skirmish Action – How it Plays

Gamers asked for an in depth look at **Skirmish Action SA** before buying. I agree completely and have prepared this intro to **SA** which walks you through setup and a turn with Designer's Notes.

Building Your Army List

SA gaming and strategy starts with your army list long before the first model hits the table top.

Army list rules were specifically designed to allow the widest latitude in building your army for either historical or tournament play. Since the rules were also designed to accommodate your preferred scale from 10-40mm and extant orgs and basing, I used the terms Unit and Model rather than squad, platoon or company. When I play I like to use 28mm individually based models so I can see them lol. Therefore, my Units are Squads and each model is one Troop or Tank. However, each model could just as easily represent a fire team or full squad of infantry or section or even platoon of tanks. No player should have to re-base or re-organize their minis to play **SA**.

SA plays best with 30-40 troops and several AFVs per side. If using one model equals one Troop or Tank as I do, then a platoon of infantry supported by a platoon of tanks works well for a game lasting a couple of hours. I have played games with only armor and using much larger forces. I've played one on one, with teams of 2 and with 4-5 players per side. The **SA** system is very versatile.

There is a strategy to making up your Units. Each Unit gets one Activation Card and is Activated to move, shoot, etc. when its card is drawn. Let's say you take 2 Sherman tanks. Putting them in one Unit means they will activate together and you can make coordinated moves and fire them at the same time. But, if you take them as 2 individual Units each of 1 Sherman, they will each get their own Activation Card and move and shoot at different times. This could allow one tank to exploit the results of the other tanks activation. It also means you lose the ability to precisely coordinate their actions. Your choice. Large Units. Small Units. Few Units. Many Units.

You can also pay to upgrade the quality or Q Rating of your Troops and Tanks. A mistake many players make is to underestimate the Q Rating's impact. Many times your Troops and Tanks will be required to make a Qtest. When Rallying from being Suppressed. Fixing Main Gun Damage on a tank. Achieving a first shot hit with HE. Ignoring Fall Back Combat Results and holding their position. Even the ability to perform two Actions (instead of just one) when Activated depends on a Qtest. Qtests are made with a d6 ranging from Passing on a roll of 2+ for Special Forces like Rangers to only Passing on a roll of 6 for untrained mobs and militia. Many players say *"well his Elite Troops Pass on a 3+ and my Regulars Pass on a 4+ how much difference can that make"*. Over the course of a game it makes a HUGE difference. The solution is to buy a Q Rating upgrade for your AFVs and at least your CinC Unit. Units Activate when their card is drawn however CinCs with higher Q Ratings get **extra cards**. When drawn these cards can be given to other Units that have not yet Activated. Thus, the higher your CinC's Q Rating the less random the card Activation is and the more Command and Control you have. The classic choice: Quantity versus Quality.

Deployment

After building your list players alternate putting their Units on the table. Depending on whether you are attacking or defending some number of your models (Models, not Units) will be able to be placed on **Overwatch** or in **Improved Cover**. Overwatch lets the Model fire in response to your opponent's moving or firing. Improved Cover makes the Model harder to hit and also lets it fire 360° from buildings regardless of openings, the model is assumed to have made loopholes etc.

After you have chosen your forces players can set up terrain and objectives for a specific scenario they wish to play or alternate setting up terrain pieces and objectives as set out in the scenario rules. Once the terrain has been set and objectives chosen, both sides place their Units.

Placement of your individual models is critical as LOS is WYSIWYG. I've seen many a battle lost during initial setup. All true tactical factors such as fields of fire, cover, covered avenues of advance, defilade positions in both defense and attack and good cover if you need to retreat must be considered. Often the most direct route to the objective is not the best one. If that route requires crossing an open field and the enemy has some MGs on Overwatch, you're in for it! When choosing defensive positions you'll want to have good fields of fire and protected flanks.

Activation & Actions

Once both sides have placed all their Units, Activation Cards are placed under each HQ (with extra cards based on Q Rating under your CinC). A regular deck of playing cards is used. Spades go under Axis HQ. Hearts under Allied HQ. The corresponding Clubs and Diamonds are placed in the Activation Deck and shuffled. When drawn they are announced as "*The Black 3*" is Activated, etc.

For example let's say one of your CinC's cards is drawn. You may elect to do one of two things:

1. Activate the CinC Unit (usually several troops in addition to the CinC such as a sniper).
2. Activate any other Unit that has not yet Activated this turn.

Let's assume you decide to activate a Unit of men. The CinC's card is placed under that Unit's HQ and both the CinC's card and the Units original card are turned Face Down to indicate they have been activated this Turn. No Unit may ever be Activated more than once per turn and placing their card(s) Face Down is a visual verification that all players can see. And of course all players can see which Unit's cards are still Face Up meaning they have not yet been Activated this turn.

When activated each Troop or Tank in a Unit may perform one Action. They may Move. Fire. Improve Cover. Go On Overwatch. Perform Recon. Or attempt to Rally from being Suppressed. After performing their *First* Action they may attempt to perform a *Second* Action. Any Second Action EXCEPT Move requires a Qtest. Average troops pass on a d6 roll of 4+ giving them a 50/50 chance. Special Forces pass on a 2+ meaning they will almost always be able to do two Actions when Activated. Militia and mobs pass only in a 6. They'll likely seldom get to do a second Action.

Sequencing of your Actions is critical. If you shoot then move you're assured that you can do both Actions because moving is the only second Action that does not require a Qtest. If you choose to move and then shoot you must pass a Qtest meaning you may not get that shot off (*one key reason to pay to upgrade the Q Rating of your best AFVs, assault troops and heavy weapons!*).

You are also allowed to move as your first Action, *stop part way through your move* and Qtest to fire. If you pass you may fire and then finish your move. If you fail you can't fire but you can still finish your move. Or you could go on Overwatch then Qtest to fire. Since Overwatch lets you fire at enemy troops that move or fire later in the turn you would get two shots in the turn. You can't fire twice when Activated but you can get two shots in a turn by firing and being on Overwatch.

You could also Move and then Qtest to Improve Cover. Or if you're already in a position you need to hold you could Improve Cover then attempt to go on Overwatch. OR go on Overwatch and then attempt to Improve Cover. Which is more important? The rules present players with a constant set of command choices. What's more important this turn ... going on Overwatch or Improving Cover? What are the odds that my troops can pass their Qtest to do both Actions?

This "sequencing" of your Actions becomes one of the critical command decisions of the game. Get it wrong and your troops will pay a heavy price. Good military tactics, such as keeping some troops on Overwatch to support others while they maneuver and sending "point men" out to scout and draw enemy fire, are critical to success when playing **SA**. The rules reward real tactics.

When the Activated Unit completes all of its Actions any troops that are in base contact with enemy troops or tanks conduct Close Assaults. Close assaults are NOT considered an Action but a result of being in Base Contact, *thus Assaults don't require a Qtest as a second Action and troops which have performed two Actions can still Assault*. Close assaults are conducted for all troops in Base Contact and conclude when one side is Knocked Out or Forced Back. Assaults are deadly.

After all firing and movement and assaults are completed the next Activation Card is drawn from the deck and the process is repeated until all cards have been drawn thus ending the turn. When playing with Artillery Fire Missions and Air Strikes, you may call in an Air Strike or Fire Mission (if you purchased them) when your Joker is drawn. Black Joker for Axis, Red Joker for Allied.

Each weapon has its own unique stats for range and ROF. The stats for a Tommy Gun and MP40 are different. They were different weapons. Tanks obviously have varying values for armor and penetration. There are a wide variety of artillery choices for support up to and including naval gunfire. Planes range from poor performance export planes like the Curtis Hawk and P-400 to late war killers like the P-47 and Typhoon. There are over 500 items on the Army Lists covering all major powers for the entire war, eliminating the need to buy supplements to field your army.

Combat

Finally, a comment on Combat Results. Combat is resolved by both the attacker and defender making a d6 roll adding it to your attack or defense value and adjusting for any modifiers (for

example defender gets pluses for cover while firer may have deductions for moving) and comparing the difference between the attacker's and defender's totals. If the attacker beats the defender Damage occurs, when there are ties or the defender beats the attacker there is no Damage. Based on how much the attacker beats the defender (by +1, +2, +3, etc) there are four possible Combat Results. **Suppressed. Forced Back. Wounded (Damaged) and Knocked Out.**

Being a believer that in battle "**stuff happens**", that there is no such thing as a sure shot or an AFV impervious to fire (don't believe that ... *ask Michael Wittmann*), **SA** includes a **No Sure Thing Rule**. When the firer rolls a "1" it's an automatic Miss. When the firer rolls a "6" they get to roll and additional d6 and add that to their total. When the defender rolls a "1" any Combat Results are increased, for example Damaged becomes Knocked Out, but when the defender rolls a "6" the firer's shot was deflected or was a dud or for some other reason failed and had No Effect. This is surprisingly effective in having players use the caution displayed by real troops in real combat. As firer you are always thinking I could miss, and as defender there's always hope. **No Sure Thing.**

Combat Results

When play testing we debated hard about using Pinned vs **Suppressed**. So many rules use Pinned. We wanted something that indicated a degradation of fighting capability more than just Pinned. Also arguing in favor of **Suppressed** was the fact that Pinned really made no sense for AFVs and we wanted one set of Combat Results for all models. **Suppressed** models Move and Fire at ½ effect. They can't advance closer to Enemy Troops and if Assaulted fight at ½ effect. You can Rally from being **Suppressed** by passing a Qtest, *but can only do this as your 1st Action when Activated.*

Forced Back means the Model must retreat to better cover, the present position has become "too hot to handle". After retreating the model is Suppressed. Models that are not already Suppressed may elect to Qtest to become Suppressed in place and not have to retreat. This is key because it allows the Model to hold their position. Troops with better Q ratings are thus more likely to hold their positions rather than retreat. Over the course of a game this is significant.

Wounded/Damaged has the same impact as Suppressed except it is permanent and can't be removed with a Qtest (unless using the *Medic Optional Rule*). Models both **Wounded/Damaged** and Suppressed can't Move or Fire. If **Wounded/Damaged** a second time they're Knocked Out.

Knocked Out. We specifically avoided the terms killed and destroyed. Many AFVs suffered damage sufficient to take them out of the fight, literally **Hors de Combat**, but were later able to be repaired and returned to service. Likewise, men could be wounded seriously and incapacitated during the current fight but later recover and return to their units. **Knocked Out** is not killed but it does mean you are Out Of The Fight for the current game and count for Enemy's Victory Points.

Winning

Winner is decided by Victory Points for Objectives held and Enemy Models Knocked Out. We kept it simple so you can focus on command decisions and tactics, not struggle with the rules. Enjoy!