

WWII Skirmish Action: Playtest

by Russ Lockwood

Dropped by On Military Matters for a playtest game of *Skirmish Action* (originally *Skirmish Action Command*) -- Lee "Combat Action Command" Sowers' skirmish-level WWII miniatures rules set. Played a Battle of the Bulge scenario last year and Lee has been working on it since then.

Allan (left) and Dennis plot the demise of the Germans. Note the allies in woods left, right, and far center. The Germans started bottom left. Jorge, Hans, and Franz will head from bottom left to center ruin.



Luck of the die roll found me in charge of three squads of German infantry while Lee ran the HQ section and the STuG III. Call it a platoon in total. Dennis and Allan had a platoon of Brits and US, along with a Cromwell tank.

The Germans were advancing towards a hamlet, coming more or less down the road while the Allies advanced through the woods. Both sought to control a six-building hamlet: one each in the 'corners' and two in the middle. In retrospect, this may have been over before a shot was fired.

Skirmish Action (SA) uses the popular card-activation sequence, where each squad of seven figures gets its own card. All cards get shuffled into one deck. Pull the card and that squad goes. In a large multi-player game with 8 or 10 gamers, this mechanic will leave people hanging around with nothing to do. In a four-player game, no problems. To be clear, SA was designed as a two-player game, but us gamers are sociable folk.

We picked edges to start, Allies in the woods on three sides and Germans in the last side. A last shuffle and game on!

Jorge, Jorge, Jorge of the Forest

"Don't be such a girlie man, Jorge," said Hans. "Get into dat ruin in the center. Dere's nobody in das woods."

"Ja. We follow you in dere," said Franz.

Jorge ran into the ruin, followed by Hans, Franz, and the rest of the squad. Before they could dig in, a torrent of Allied firing picked off German after German.

"Jorge!" said Hans. "Watch out for that tree!"

"Ja!" said Franz. "Put some firepower into das woods."

Meanwhile, the Bren gun, the sten gun, the grease gun, the tommy gun, the machine gun, and even a Peter Gunn riddled the ruins, knocking off Germans with regularity, winging Jorge. He retreated back to the safety of his own lines, but was wounded in the open, to lie in a puddle of his own rapid blood loss.

Then Franz yelled, "Acht! Dey got mir!"

Hans raced over. "Franz, you're punctured. Your blood loss is deflating you. We've got to pump you up!"

Hans took the HE shell from the Cromwell in the head. Soon, not a single German remained alive in the ruin, even after the STuG rushed to the side of the ruin in support. A bazooka, eventually, did in the STuG. Jorge managed to crawl his way back to his own lines. The Allies captured both buildings until a new STuG blew them out of one.

How's That?

Each man in a squad is allowed to do two actions (although only one shooting action). So, he can move twice (usually 8 inches, but some troops have 10-inch movement), or move and shoot, shoot and move, move and dig in, dig in and set Overwatch, etc. Of course, while some fellow is doing something, an opposing figure, if on Overwatch, can fire.

The blurry photo shows most of the battlefield at the end of turn 1. Jorge, Hans, Franz, and the 3 of Spades squad in the center ruin by the STuG, Brits heading to the second center ruin. Grease-gun Gus and Thompson SMG Tommy (off photo to left) crushed the Ace of Spades German squad.



Shooting is via d6 plus weapon quality versus d6 plus defender modifiers for cover, etc. Difference between the totals determines what happens to the defender.

If the shooter rolls a 6, he gets to roll another d6 and add that to the total. If the shooter rolls a 1, it's an automatic miss. If the defender rolls a 6, it's an automatic miss. There are a couple more wrinkles involved, but SA is simple enough to learn the basics in a few minutes. As you might expect, kills often, but not always, occur when the shooter rolls a 6. Otherwise, it's gradual chaos that envelopes a squad in firefights.

More Skirmish Action

On the right flank, I sent a squad to occupy another ruin and paid the Brits back by knocking off a number of fellows in the woods. This time, I was able to dig into the rubble, which helps quite a bit -- even against HE rounds.

HE rounds are vicious -- if they land on target and explode, everyone in the house gets attacked. The results are often not pretty. The digging in modifier really helps here. A house is defined as a 6-inch by 6-inch area. The only saving grace from a defenders' point of view is that on a roll of 1 or 2, the shooter does NOT get the round off. Originally, like other skirmish rules, rounds were tracked, etc. This rule does away with all those calculations and die rolls.

Overwatch Confusion

In Lee's other game, *Combat Action Command*, each unit has a *CAC* interrupt option usable any time, so of course I was using the *SA* Overwatch like that. I screamed 'FIRE!' at all times during the initial turns. Not true. *SA* Overwatch only allows a figure to do something in reaction to an enemy activation.

Now, if an activation triggers an Overwatch shoot and I'm on Overwatch, I can shoot the shooters (after they shoot, of course, because they activated). Like dominoes falling, you can get quite the Overwatch scrum going at times.

A figure gets one Overwatch shoot per turn, assuming it does not move. If it moves, it is no longer 'watching' over there and so must use an action and roll a successful quality test to get Overwatch back on.

End of the Line

The Allies cleaned the German clock. Two US troops -- grease gun Gus and Thompson submachine gun Tommy -- in particular had a banner day against the German squad facing them, picking off what they did not wound or suppress. Their buddy, obviously a replacement, was whacked quickly, but Gus and Tommy held out and added about 10 marksmanship badges to their sashes.

The Allies crunched the Germans, with five captured houses to one. Scrappy little fight, though, with the post-battle Germans thinking they should have spread out some when they had the chance at set-up instead of funneling into the hamlet down a road.

Playtest Version

Note that this is a playtest version, so some rules and procedures are likely to change.