

A Piper at the Gates

a Hammer's Slammers scenario

I had the pleasure of running a game of *Hammer's Slammers: The Crucible* for my Editor Henry Hyde in July and, although the scenario is particular to the genre, as Henry found out it was, under the skin, an all-too-familiar modern 'asymmetrical warfare' type of encounter.

This is a scenario set in the Hammer's Slammers universe, based around the books written by David Drake and – specifically – the story **Paying the Piper**. It uses the Hammer's Slammers: The Crucible rule book (for which I was the lead author) and forces outlined in that set and on the website www.hammers-slayers.com.

Brief genre catch up

Set in the not too distant future, the Slammers books – and the rules – are often seen as primarily an AFV based environment, however careful reading of Drake's work and scanning of the rules options demonstrate the flexibility in terms of combat: there are many stories where infantry actions are important and the idea of this game was to reflect that.

Scenario

Melinda Riker Grayle is a figure head of a group called the Solace Militia on Plattner's World. It's people are involved in negotiations centering around the trade in an anti-aging drug harvested from a moss that grows on trees spread all over the planet's one, large continent and – needless to say – the talks aren't going well. Although Grayle is a politician, she's not in the ruling government but instead has a considerable following among the Moss rangers who collect the raw material for drug that is the planet's chief - and very profitable – export. The government called in Hammer's Slammers - an armoured mercenary regiment - to quell open rebellion from their opposition (who have themselves hired *other* mercenaries to leverage their side of the argument) and that's where the scenario begins, but not with an all out attack of mercenary versus mercenary forces. In the book, that comes later...

In 343TW (The Way) – and before the end of the story which ends in a number of set piece battles – Grayle's people are based in a headquarters building in the capital city Midway and, during the course of the narrative, a force of Slammers Combat Cars are sent into the town to recover documentary evidence against Grayle's Freedom Fighters that will prove that they are corrupt.

The game will pit a poorly trained, mostly infantry force against Task Force Sangrela - a Slammers unit led by Lt Arne Huber in his own Combat Car called 'Fencing Master'. Just to clarify, a Slammer's Combat Car is an open topped vehicle (not unlike a WW2 Hannomag 251 half-track in layout) mounting three tribarrel powerguns but operating – with four crew – in a not dissimilar fashion to an ACAV M113 from the Vietnam conflict.

One of the elements new to the rules for the Crucible Edition in 2010 was the use of Elite skills to add flavour: special abilities that can be used by skilled leaders and even whole units to make them more effective.

The play sheet for Lt Huber's force features one of these rules: Huber and his men are not just Elite, they are what's called a 'Prime Detachment': they have skills added to their regular colleagues abilities (as befits their position within the story itself): they can fire better on the move - and some more accurately - and they make better use of cover with their vehicles making them harder to hit, along with other skills (field repairs for minor damage and such like). This makes the one unit quite formidable.

The scenario objective for the Slammers player is to park a vehicle - any vehicle - outside the Freedom Party Headquarters for three turns to enable the troops to search the building and retrieve documents which will incriminate Grayle and – perhaps – diffuse (or end) the civil war that is looming. You can probably guess how that works out in the novel!

In the scenario, simply parking the vehicle will be enough. The Solace 'Freedom Fighters' will do anything to stop them. *Anything...*

Forces

The Slammers have one detachment of eight combat cars (as per the play sheet www.hammers-slayers.com/pdf/Hammers_Slayers_Huber1_15mm_sheet.pdf). Players using this scenario could mess with that if they chose: in the story they have a single tank as back up or you could include a jeep or infantry deployed from a Wrenchmobile – a flat bed recovery vehicle which can carry up to 20 infantry along with their own shorter range transport if required (flying one man skimmers). All of these are available in 15mm from Ainsty and GZG (vehicles and infantry) and most could be sourced in 6mm or 28mm if you so desire. However, for simplicity (and as Henry hadn't played the system before) I chose him to have a force with just one type of unit: all Combat Cars.

Grayle's Freedom Fighters

These use the play sheet: www.hammers-slayers.com/pdf/Solace_Militia1_15mm_sheet.pdf
There is one detachment of militia comprising lots of un-trained infantry (25 TUs – Tactical Units – of figures, between 3 and 8 on a base) armed with everything from shotguns to molotovs and satchel charges, with even a few shoulder launched anti tank weapons. They have transport in the shape of air-vans, each with a machine gun on the roof. There is also a second detachment of trained militia. They are equipped with powergun small arms but their punch comes from the four Calliopes, brought in on air cars, which can be hidden in buildings (they can't be fired from the truck bed). The Trained Militia also have a military commander.

Finally they have 4 Heavy Mines (IEDs in fact) set up in town which are command detonated: these have a varying chance to hit depending on visibility of the target to the detonator. If they were carefully placed as mines are under the vehicles they would be more effective (AFVs have a lower armour value underneath) but the downside of this is they can be detected by the Slammers and mines placed in vehicles and walls are harder to spot. And move (as Henry found out...).

The small arms that the militia and toughs carry are useless against armoured vehicles (the powerguns might punch through the lighter, mesh roofs of the combat cars if firing down from high buildings) however they can literally swarm the Slammers Combat cars if they can get past the automatic anti-personnel mines the vehicles carry to deter just such an action.

For the player using Grayle's forces (and she will be present using her leadership abilities to 'encourage' her followers) it all depends on planning for stealthy attacks to take out combat cars.

Table Layout

A main building in the center of town which has a roadway around and a main road going past it forms the Militia HQ. Surrounding that are many buildings with trees interspersed between them. Neither side wants to damage the precious trees as it's their cash crop...

The militia and toughs can set up anywhere within 50cm of the HQ in any direction – they don't know what direction the Slammers will come in from. They may place up to half of their units in hiding in buildings, on whatever floor they wish (multi story buildings are catered for in the rules).

Although the buildings are not large or open enough to hide complete vehicles from view, they may hide infantry and the multi barreled calliopes which have been unloaded from their transport vehicles.

The Solace Militia and Freedom Fighters adds up to 45 Tactical Units (TUs) – i.e. stands of infantry (36 of them) or vehicle elements (9 in total), so 22 could be hidden: sensibly that should probably be the four dismounted calliopes (leaving the vehicles in the street as road blocks) and 18 of the infantry... These should be marked on a map by the Militia player, along with the positions of the 4 IEDs before the Slammers deploy.

Remember, they are led by Grayle but the trained Militia can have a military commander (Halcleides) is also present and – in a desperate attempt to get them moving – they can pool their leadership points.

When all of the Solace militia are deployed the Slammers player may place their 8 Combat cars any where they like, grouped how they chose, no more than 20cm from a table edge. They have their Lieutenant in command with two named Sergeants – one (Deseau) in his own vehicle and another (Trantor) in his own vehicle. In the event of Huber being eliminated, Trantor will take over command.

Table size

This can be quite a small table. The militia infantry don't move far, their weapons – at least the ones that can actually damage the combat cars - are not likely to reveal their positions until the poorly trained crews can see the whites of the Slammer's eyes, the IEDs are pretty hit and miss (literally) so it's only the Calliopes that have any chance of destroying a Car at range and they have probably worked out that, after the first shot (when they reveal their position) they are not likely to last long... The combat cars only really need enough room to maneuver to get the best advantage so - in 1/100th - this game could be played on a table as small as 4ft square, or so. Our table was about 6ft by 7ft.

Tips

Use trees and *lots* of urban scenery – the Slammers weapons (and the Militia Calliopes) can range the entire table's line of sight (no matter how big the table or what scale you are using!) so everyone needs a lot of cover. The militia have to swarm and attack in great numbers, knowing full well that they are going to get shot and destroyed... a lot. Placement of the hidden units is vital but – inevitably – with the Slammers superior c3, the militia player will not manage to bring all of the IEDs and calliopes into effective play unless they are very lucky.

For the Slammers player, just use speed and extreme violence of action to get in and get out!

Options

If you play the scenario more than once – or you don't like IEDs – consider using snipers with the Militia, perhaps even well trained snipers from the later five rules supplements (available from the www.hammers-slayers.com website for free)

How did the game play out with Henry Hyde and myself

The game was an interesting exercise. As I started earlier, *The Crucible* rules are often seen as an AFV heavy system with infantry sometimes relegated to less important – or less glamorous – roles. To be fair, that's often true! In this scenario, however, the asymmetric nature of the confrontation meant that – for the Solace Militia and Freedom Fighters – they had little more in the way of mobility than the flying equivalent of technicals and trucks: sure, each had a machine gun of some sort mounted but nothing that would have any real effect against AFVs like the

Slammer's Combat Cars, especially when manned by experienced crews like those using the Elite Skills system employed in The Crucible edition of the rules. So – for them – it was 'PBI' all the way.

So, the infantry fighting the Slammers only had a few options, most of which were only viable when attacking from cover or height. In consequence, the combat that took place was typified by mass infantry attacks from buildings and debussing from transport vehicles with hand weapons and small arms, supplemented by Molotov cocktails and satchel charges plus acts of desperation in the shape of IEDs and suicide truck bombs, along with some RPG attacks.

Henry had the Slammers split their forces and eschewed the roads as being obviously suspicious: he decided the risk wasn't worth the trade-off of the extra speed afforded by tarmac surfaces (qualifying in the rules, like the shallow lakes featured in the terrain, as 'easy terrain' for the hovering 'blower' Combat Cars). And he was right: the Freedom Fighters had four vehicles packed with explosives parked on the blacktop, hidden in plain site amongst twenty others. They also had four dismounted Calliopes – multi barreled powerguns – hidden: two in building doorways with a third under the monorail, all forming a killing ground in the plaza in front of the HQ building. I tried hard to lure Henry's AFVs into the town center, but he was both experienced and cautious!

As the Cars approached, the Militia held their ground and – for three turns – the latter stood behind their road blocks and amassed Leadership points for both detachments and simply built them up them in a 'pool'. This provides a header of motivational Leadership and neatly represented the commanders briefing their people in advance and psyching them up for the inevitable firefight.

In the fourth turn, when the Slammers forces had got within range, the militia began a series of attacks, spurred on by the fact that the Slammers had started some 'recon by fire' using the simple expedience of attacking parked cars and other vehicles, suspicious of what they might be. Sure enough, when one didn't just disintegrate under concentrated powergun fire (or even have fuel tanks rupture and explode) but blow with a *huge* explosion and leave a burning crater in the tarmac, Henry realised that his caution had been well placed and, as many of their opponents (those who weren't cowering behind barricades) were obviously in hiding, he proceeded to wipe out whatever transportation he could lay a bead on, just in case!

In desperation, the militia began to use four combined tactics. To draw their opponents in, they revealed one of their calliopes and opened fire on a Slammers AFV and over ran the gun barrels until they burnt out to secure a strike but the combat car, though hit, survived. They also rushed infantry to two of the bomb-laden vehicles, turned them into suicide vehicles, and drove them at Combat Cars. One failed to explode: no matter how much their leader shouted at the infantry driving it – i.e. no matter how many quality rolls I made and how many leadership points I spent - I couldn't make the roll needed to blow the vehicle and the occupants were wiped out by the Slammers AFV. However, the other had more success and blew up next to a Combat Car and destroyed it. The militia also took out another Combat Car – the Slammer's commander, in fact – with Buzzbombs (RPGs) fired down from a high building in through the vehicle's roof (and thereby avoiding the vehicle's anti-buzzbomb – and anti-personnel – defensive system).

Finally, a car was damaged when swarmed by seven infantry stands (about 30 figures). The afore-mentioned anti-personnel system (effectively 'claymore' style mines in a ring around the perimeter of the vehicle that can be set off on command by the crew or automatically by the vehicle's AI systems) took out four of the stands but three got through. With some 'encouragement' – leadership points spent to motivate them to do a better job – they swarmed the Combat Car and attacked it with petrol bombs and succeeded in disabling the vehicle, bringing it to a halt (flaming petrol in the intakes, no doubt) but no more than that. The crew managed to repair the car as they had the field mechanic specialist skill and – in the next turn –

fought off their attackers, and so the remaining six Slammers AFV's worked their way into my killing ground.

Unfortunately, by that stage (in turn 12) my citizenry 'Freedom Fighters' had been reduced to immobility and could do nothing without assistance from the military commander of the trained militia – that is, their losses were such that their leader Grayle simply could not give constructive orders (or enough encouragement or threats!) to get them to move and do anything constructive except return fire (to no effect). However, following some orders given by the other unit's commander, they made one final buzzbomb attack in classic 'run out into the street, fire and hope' fashion. But to no effect and all too little too late: after the Slammers blowing their last vehicle IED in place (and the explosion killing the four stands of infantry hiding in the monorail car directly above) the losses the Solace forces suffered were such – over 50% in both the trained and untrained forces – that their morale broke and, just as the Slammers moved into position to be strafed with the two remaining Calliopes, the game was over.

The Slammers had lost their commander and another car but had won the scenario.

Conclusion

Henry said that the “sub Fallujah” elements (IEDs and suicide bombs, Molotovs and satchel charges) of the scenario were quite unusual for him and not something he'd had to face before. In the real world, governments that don't all agree with each other, tear themselves and their country (or planet) apart and fight one another for control of... well, anything really, is a story as relevant today as it has always been and, undoubtedly, will continue to be. We all know the Chinese curse about living in interesting times.

But this is just a bit of fun!

John Treadaway

Quotes from the original story by Drake:

"If a car's damaged that bad, you blow her in place, report a combat loss, and move on... This mission is more important than the hardware. Understood?" Major Danny Pritchard

Information about the game:

All buildings are either scratch built (like the greenhouses, for example) or commercially available from 4Ground or model railway buildings (like some of the tower blocks and the basis of the monorail station). Other terrain – the pools and monorail track are all scratch built. The road way is plastic fit together 'toy' roads suitably painted up.

Forces are Combat Cars by Ainsty, other vehicles by Ground Zero Games and Old Crow plus many commercial diecasts, all painted up. All figures are by GZG.

All forces painted by John Treadaway

All photography by The Editor and The Author!

Rules available from Ainsty and Caliver Books. All supplements and play aids are free downloads at www.hammers-slayers.com