

## Pfeiffer's Last Ride: The Battle of Rots & Le Hamel - After Action Report

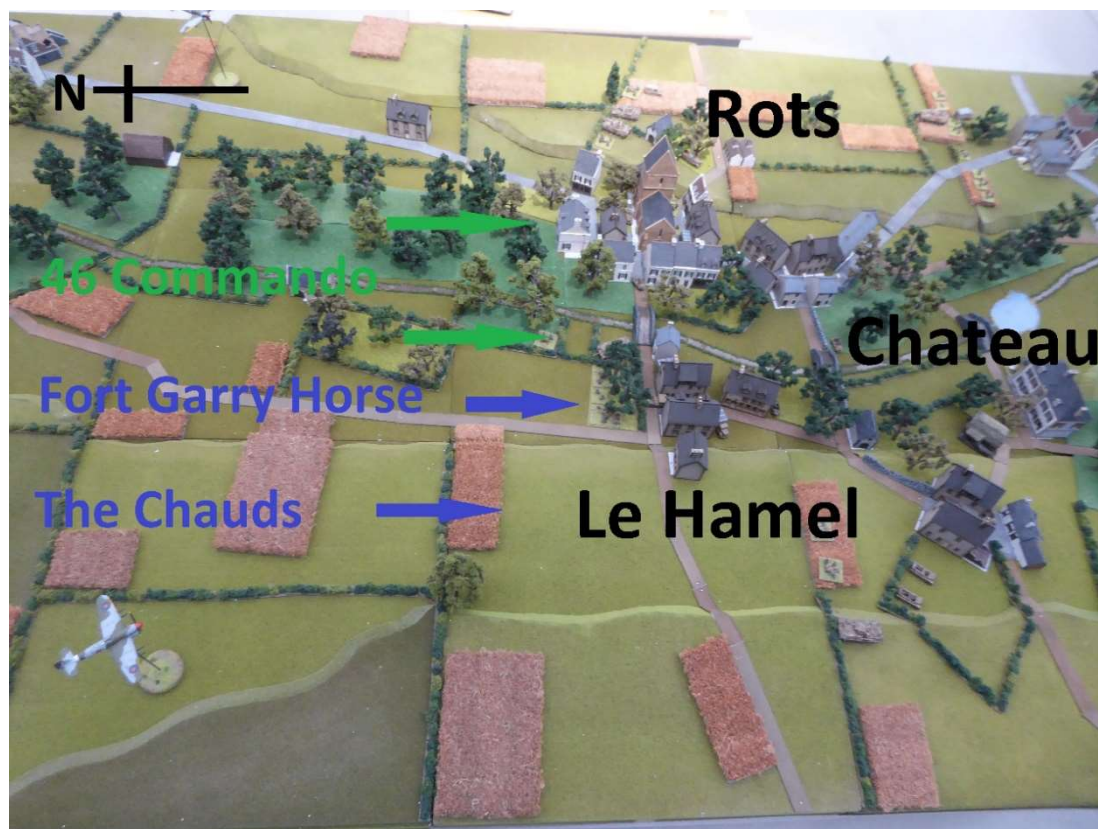
Fortunately, we had a quiet corner of the air-conditioned new hall for our game. Unfortunately we were in front of a TV screen with a short video on the history of the tank playing on a loop. Did you know that the three most important elements for an armoured vehicle are firepower, protection and mobility? I do, because I was told that every 10 minutes for two days... We had a steady stream of interested on-lookers who at one stage brought the game to a halt for over an hour! Many browsed through my copy of Keith Taylor's book "The Waist-High Cornfield" – his superb account of his father's experiences as a Commando at Rots (available online through the Royal Marines shop).

Thank you to Mark Davies for a great scenario – a shame that a family wedding kept you away. In the end, it was Paddy, Stephen and me at the table. We played with our favoured combination of 15mm figures, using the 20mm ground-scale.

Rots and Le Hamel are a pair of villages straddling the small River Mue, a couple of miles north-west of Caen. In the first week after D-day, these villages found themselves on the front line. As the allied push to the west of Caen developed, their control became more important to secure the flank of the advance

The line here was held by the over-stretched 12SS *Hitlerjugend* Panzer Division (Paddy). The villages were held by units from 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion SS-Panzer Grenadier Regiment 26; a weakened Panzer Grenadier Company in Rots, the Heavy Weapons company in Le Hamel with the Divisional Escort Company in reserve at the Chateau. All were supported by the Panthers from Pfeiffer's 4<sup>th</sup> Company.

The Allies? 46 RM Commando (Stephen) had seen their D-day assault on a coastal battery cancelled due to the success of naval gunfire. Who else to lead the assault on dug-in SS Panzer Grenadiers? This sector of the allied line belonged to the Canadians (Richard). Support for the assault was to come from a squadron of the Fort Garry Horse (FGH) and an infantry battalion, La Regiment de la Chaudiere - the *Chauds*.



The Allied attack plan was historical. Two troops (A and Z) moved down the wooded river valley east of the river to attack Rots. The main attack was by B S X & Y troops, supported by the FGH, through the broken terrain west of the river against Le Hamel, then to cross the river and join the attack on Rots. The *Chauds* were to follow the Commandos and help with mopping up.





Seen from the east, all quiet in Rots... The Church (Tiger Terrain) dominates the north part of the village but woods and orchards do provide a covered approach. On the west side of the river, SS-Panzergranadiers gather outside Le Hamel to plan their deployment



Seen from the north board edge, the wooded River Mue valley separates the two axes of attack with the main attack going down the line of the unpaved road leading to Le Hamel. Just above the centre of the photo is the watermill (not windmill RMD...) where, historically, the final 'O-group' by 46 RM Commando was held.





Seen from the east, the dug-in Panzergrenadiers of the Heavy Weapons company have prepared a strong position in Le Hamel. The orchards and woods outside the village hold a PAK 75 & 20mm FLAKs (and a Panther...). Light infantry guns provided support from the cornfields whilst the houses behind the orchards are held by HMGs and LMGs.



The same position seen from the south-west with a Panther giving depth to the defence. This highlights the contrasting terrain. Open fields on the flanks with scant cover from hedges and waist-high cornfields, changing abruptly into the villages in the heavily-wooded river valley.





The Allies form up for the attack. To the east of the river, A-troop move towards the woods that will cover their advance towards Rots. To the west, Major Blanshard (A squadron FGH) is adamant that his Shermans are going nowhere until he knows where the PAK's and Panthers are to be found.



First contact sees X-troop come under fire as they advance through the cornfields. Meanwhile B-troop, in the cover of woods and orchards, closes in on the positions of the Heavy Weapons company





Within a couple of turns, the battle begins in earnest. Under cover of an artillery barrage, A-troop assault the northern edge of Rots, whilst west of the river, B-troop assault the first of the Heavy Weapons positions



In Rots, a long spell of yo-yo close combat gets underway as A-troop gain a foot-hold in the houses at the north edge of the village. Neither side is going to give ground easily....





The assault on Le Hamel intensifies. B troop move forwards towards the Panther. Under cover of smoke, X-troop launch an attack on the PAK position in the orchards but get forced to ground by intense defensive fire



Sensing that the German forward positions have enough to keep themselves occupied, Major Blanshard moves the FGH forward. But the *Hitlerjugend* PAK crews have remained vigilant. The first of the Shermans brews up...





Momentum swings back to the Germans. A counter-attack has pushed A-troop out of its foot-hold in Rots back into the woods. A bold move forwards by the FGH ends in disaster as more Shermans are lost to PAK and Panthers. However, this does allow X-troop to close in on the PAK position which is taken out in close combat

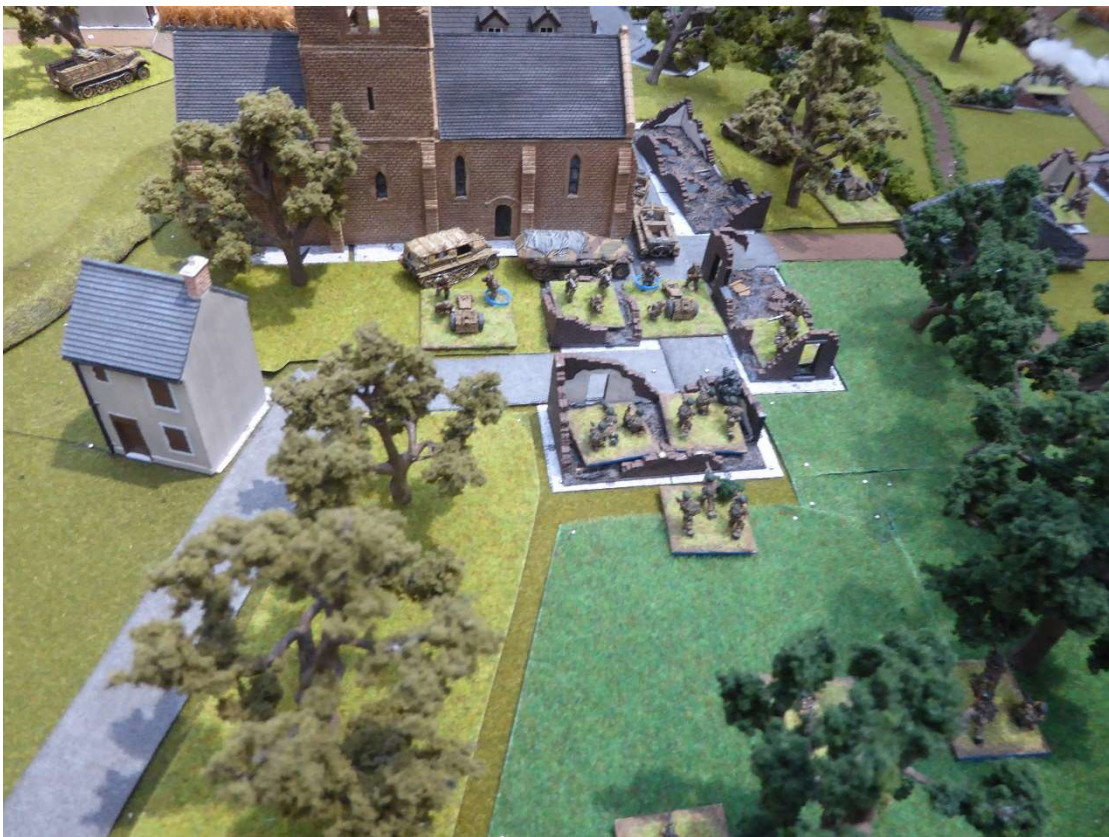


The battle in Rots pauses whilst reinforcements (Z-troop) move forward. At Le Hamel, B-troop force the Panther to pull back. This allows the FGH to push forwards and start to shoot X-troop into Le Hamel





Seen from the south. Sensing that the defence of Le Hamel is coming to an end, Panzer-pioneers and Panthers start to form a strong fall-back position around the high walls of the Chateau's estate



The bitter fighting at Rots continues. Supported by IDF from the RM Centaurs, the fresh marines from Z-troop force their way back into the north edge of Rots. The infantry gun position in the orchard by the church survives sustained IDF from the Centaurs. Casualties on both sides mount...





At Le Hamel, B-troop and X-troop move east to cross the river Mue and support the attack on Rots whilst (left edge of photo), the *Chauds* move in to mop up the remnants of the Heavy Weapons Company (CO, LMG, Panzergrenadier). Never underestimate *Hitlerjugend*. Temporarily isolated, the FGH lose another Sherman to a Panzerfaust. Another Sherman pulls back and is lost to defensive fire as it withdraws



The *Chauds* arrive in strength. A and B Companies move into La Hamel whilst the last of the commandos move across towards Rots. The Shermans of the FGH remain penned up due to the threat from the Panther's long range fire down the flanks.





Whilst awaiting fresh reinforcements, Z-troop pull back out of Rots to escape punishing fire from the infantry guns. A stand-off, but two reinforcement troops of Commandos approach from Le Hamel



The *Chauds* anti-tank platoon gets into position and threatens the Panthers still lurking on the open flank behind Le Hamel





The pendulum swings back in favour of the Allies. The *Chauds* are firmly established in Le Hamel but reluctant to push south towards strong German positions at the Chateau.



A sustained push by B-troop and X-troop threatens to overwhelm the battered defenders in Rots whilst the reserve Y-troop are ready to exploit the break-in





With the remaining German positions in Rots coming under sustained attack, Pfeiffer comes forward in his Panther alongside the ruins of the church to stabilise the tired Panzergrenadiers. Will history be repeated and will Pfeiffer die in his Panther in confused fighting in the centre of Rots?



As night starts to fall, Panzerpioneers launch a counter-attack into Le Hamel but suffer losses to the *Chauds* antitank guns on the way in. They do regain a foot-hold in Le Hamel.





Don't tell Paddy but...

We did play out one more turn after he had left to determine Pfeiffer's fate. In a series of brutal close combats, stripped of Paddy's dice rolling, the Commandos cleared the *Hitlerjugend* from the area of Rots around the church. They came very close to KO'ing Pfeiffer in close combat, but he managed to extricate his Panther from the village, reversing back down the narrow streets towards the Chateau.

The outcome? Yet again, very close to the historical outcome – a bloody draw. The Commandos had battered their way into Rots and Le Hamel, securing the north crossing of the river Mue. But they would not have had the strength to overcome Pfeiffer's Panthers and carry the fight to the final German positions around the Chateau.

RMD – the scenario was superb. It felt balanced but challenging for both sides. Paddy's tactic of moving the Panthers forward early to bolster PAK was very successful at nullifying the impact of Allied armour. The RM Centaurs restricted themselves to IDF, the FGH Shermans struggled to get into positions to support the infantry. Limited artillery was refreshing. The Allies only used MIKE targets on a couple of occasions, with negligible results against dug-in Panzergrenadiers. Most of the IDF-support came from the battalion mortars and the RM Centaurs. The infantry battles were often, as expected, brutal close combats and the high discipline ratings meant that ME's just kept going even after taking very heavy losses.

Thank you Paddy and Stephen for a great weekend!