

Pfeiffer's Last Ride - The Battle of Le Hamel and Rots

Sunday 11th June 1944

By R Mark Davies

With invaluable contributions by Paddy Green and Richard de Ferrars

'Suddenly a Panther appeared to support us. It was a terrible sight as we saw the tank churning through the dead and wounded... we launched a counter-attack with its support. A little later someone shouted "Tank behind you!" Our tank was in a difficult position as it was impossible to turn round in that narrow street. I reversed as far as a place where I could at least traverse the turret through 180° and then I drove slowly as far as the exit from the village. Suddenly a Sherman appeared in front. Our crew then realised what was happening, as with roaring engine, I tried to reach the edge of the village to be able to traverse the turret. But I never got there and our Panther was destroyed... I found out later that Hauptsturmführer Pfeiffer had been killed in the tank.' – SS-Oberscharführer Erwin Wohlgemuth, 4. Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Regiment 12

'There was a new attack on the village during the afternoon and our tanks from the 3rd Troop fought in the streets with the Shermans and the infantry which had infiltrated. The 1st Troop tanks, including the commander's one, reached a small hill behind which a Panther with a damaged track had sought shelter. I asked a couple of grenadiers to give me a hand to repair the track which they did in spite of the enemy shell bursts. From the outside I hears the radio operator transmitting urgent orders to Hauptsturmführer Pfeiffer: "Hurry up. The pressure is too strong". Our own infantry moved onto the reverse slope of the hill, while I drove up to the top to be beside the troop commander's tank. A group of grenadiers found themselves exposed without the means of defence, in a ditch, under fire from the Canadian tanks. We opened fire on the Shermans and the enemy infantry. I took a glance out to my left and saw the boss's tank moving down from the hill. A minute later I heard he was dead.' – SS-Sturmann Hans Kesper, 4. Kompanie, SS-Panzer-Regiment 12

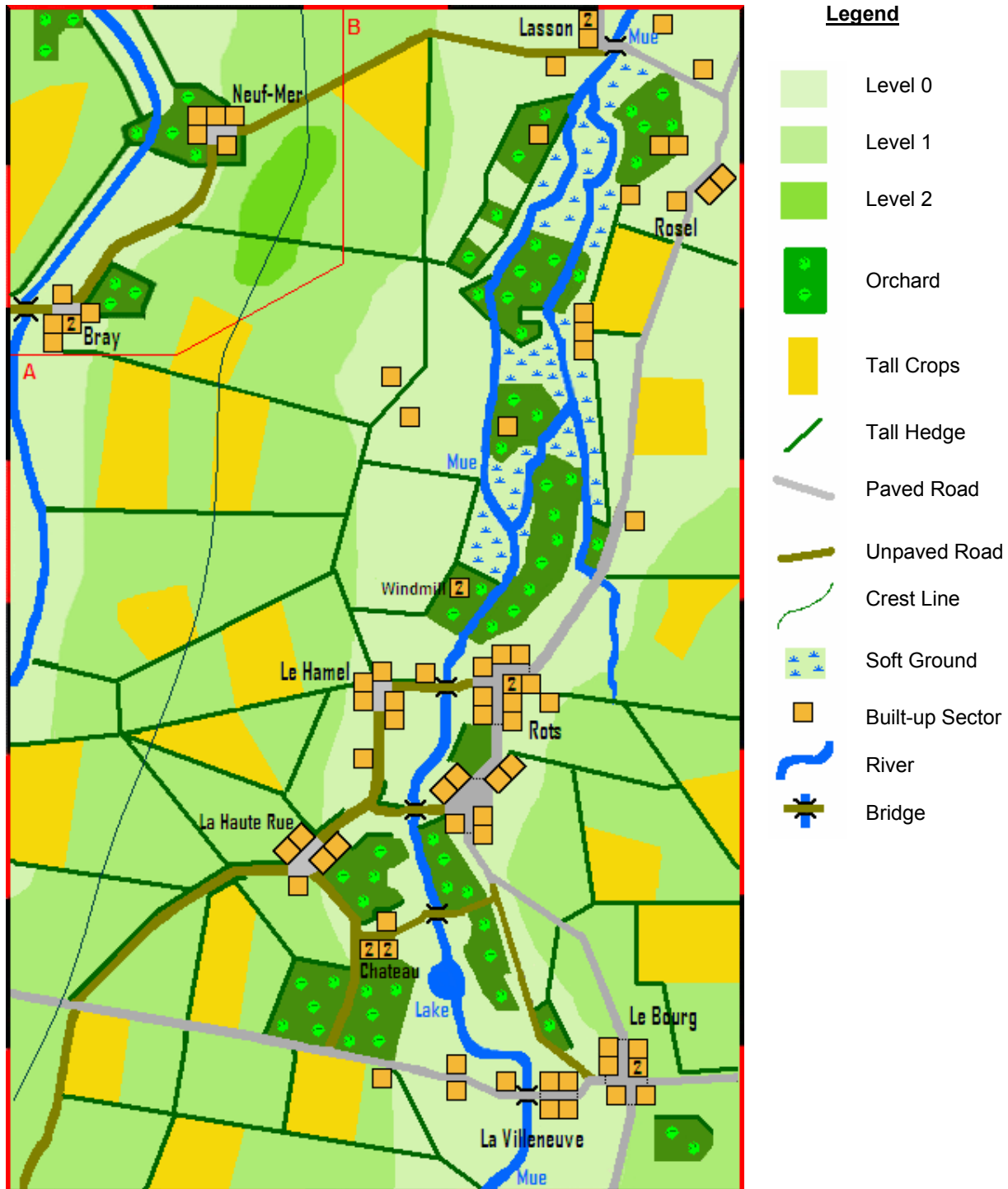
'They fought like lions on both sides, so that the dead lay corpse by corpse. We searched every house, every courtyard to avoid ambush. And here is the confirmation of how ferocious last night's battle must have been. The Commandos lie dead in rows beside the dead SS. Grenades are scattered all over the road and in the porches of houses. Here we see a Commando and an SS man, literally dead in each other's arms, having slaughtered each other. There, a German and a Canadian tank have engaged each other to destruction, and are still smouldering, and from each blackened turret hangs the charred corpse of a machine gunner. Over here are a group who ran towards a wall for shelter and were shot down before they got there. And then near the church, as the advance guard of C Company and the carriers turn the corner, there are three Germans. Only three. But one of them instantly draws his pistol and hits one of our men. A Bren gunner kills two of the three SS men, but the survivor gets away. Now we understand with what kind of fanatic we have to deal.' – Regimental History, Régiment de la Chaudière

Historical Overview

The attempted counterattack by 12. SS-Panzer-Division 'Hitlerjugend' on 8th June against the Allied bridgehead was halted just northwest of Carpiquet Airfield by the efforts of Keller's 3rd Canadian Infantry Division and Wyman's 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade. Repeated attempts by Hitler's 'Black Hussars' to break through the Canadian lines at Norrey-en-Bessin and Bretteville l'Orgueilleuse have all been beaten off and the Allies have now regained the initiative. The Canadians are launching a major effort to relieve their isolated outpost at Norrey-en-Bessin, and drive through German lines to seize Carpiquet Airfield and the Cheux Heights, thus outflanking the western flank of Caen.

On the eastern flank of this operation is the village of Rots, which is occupied by elements of the SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 26 and a company of Panthers from SS-Panzer-Regiment 12. This position sticks like a thorn in the side of 3rd Canadian Division and must be seized if the planned operation is to be successful. The task is to be given to Blackader's 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade, spearheaded by the British 46 Royal Marine Commando and the tanks of the Fort Garry Horse...

Map & Terrain



Notes

1. The table as shown is 8ft x 5ft. To play on a 6ft x 4ft table just use the south-east area of the table (lower right)
2. The River Mue is fordable at all points and counts as a wide stream the small tributary to the east counts as a shallow stream but runs through a culvert under the paved road which therefore counts a bridge. The lake adjacent to the chateau is unfordable.
3. The southern table edge is delineated by the Caen-Bayeux railway line. The railway embankment blocks LOS to the south and prevents supporting German fire from that direction.
4. All 2 story BUAs should be depicted as churches except the chateau and Windmill as marked.

Briefing for Brigadier K.G. Blackader, Commanding 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade

Situation

The assault by the élite German 12th SS 'Hitler Youth' Panzer Division now appears to have ground to a halt. They first attacked on 8th June, crossing the Bayeux-Caen railway line and the RN13 highway and seizing the villages of La Villeneuve and Rots, in the valley of the Mue. Having established their base at Rots and having bypassed the Canadian position at Norrey-en-Bessin, the Germans launched a determined assault on Bretteville l'Orgueilleuse during the night of 8/9th June. Thanks to the tenacious defence of our division, the attack was beaten off in fierce fighting. Indeed, the division destroyed the first Panther tanks encountered thus far in Normandy. An attack on Norrey-en-Bessin by a squadron of Panthers on the 9th was also beaten off, this time by the replacement squadron of the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade, with considerable loss to the enemy in Panthers and men.

With the German assault stalled, Monty has decided that we now have enough troops and materiel assembled in Normandy to allow us to resume the offensive. The division's outpost south of the railway at Norrey-en-Bessin is looking increasingly precarious – particularly given that the German defenders of Rots are able to bring heavy fire onto the flank of any troops or vehicles attempting to resupply or reinforce the position. Therefore, the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division, with the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade, the British 8th Armoured Brigade and the British 69th Infantry Brigade under command, will eliminate the Rots salient and will cross the railway line, move through Norrey-en-Bessin and expand the salient, to include Le Mesnil Patry and the high ground south of Cheux.

Mission

Your brigade is to assault the German battalion holding Rots and push them out of the village and south of the railway line, thus protecting the left flank of the division from any counter-attack from the direction of Carpiquet or Caen.

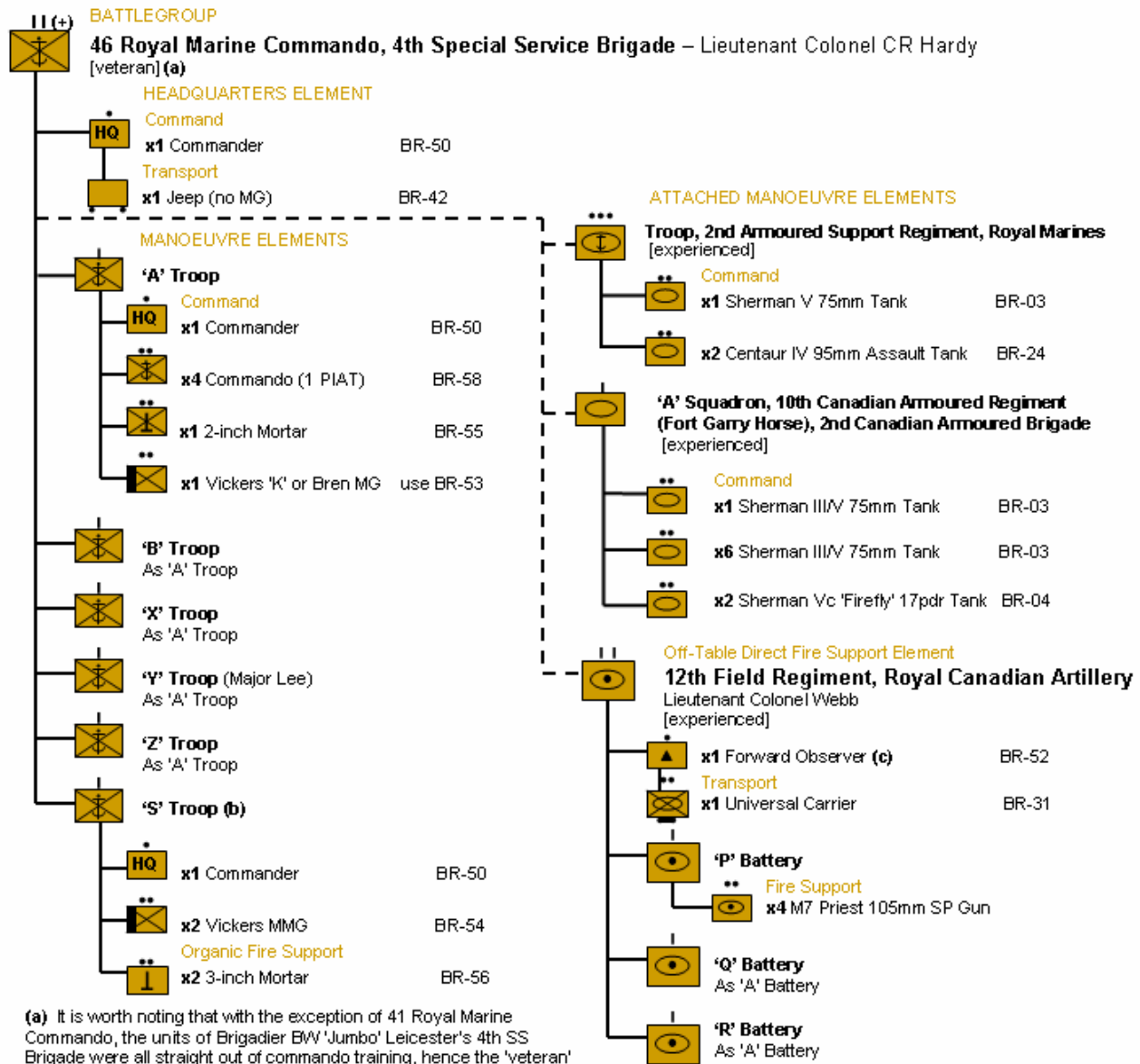
Execution

Army has given your brigade the services of the British 46 Royal Marine Commando. They are highly-trained and incredibly tough soldiers and should be ideal for the task of seizing Rots. The Commandos, supported by the 12th Field Regiment, a squadron of the Fort Garry Horse and a troop of Royal Marine tanks, will assault directly up the Mue valley. As Rots is a linear settlement running roughly north-south, this will bring the assault against the narrowest part of the enemy defence line, thus reducing the amount of defensive fire. Once the Commandos have got the attention of the enemy, you will then directly assault the village with as much of your brigade as you can spare.

Sorry, but AGRA (i.e. corps artillery), naval gunfire and tactical air support will not be available to you, as these will be required for the main assault on Le Mesnil Patry, as well as by the 6th Airborne Division, who are under intense pressure to the east of Caen. You will therefore have to make do with what you've got.

Enemy forces are expected to consist of a weak battalion of SS panzer grenadiers, though are likely to be well-equipped with heavy weapons and mortars. They have also had three days in which to get settled, so expect the defence to be stiff. They are also likely to be supported by a squadron of Panthers and in classic German style, a counter-attack infantry force.

Allied Assault Group (Under Command of 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade, 3rd Canadian Infantry Division)

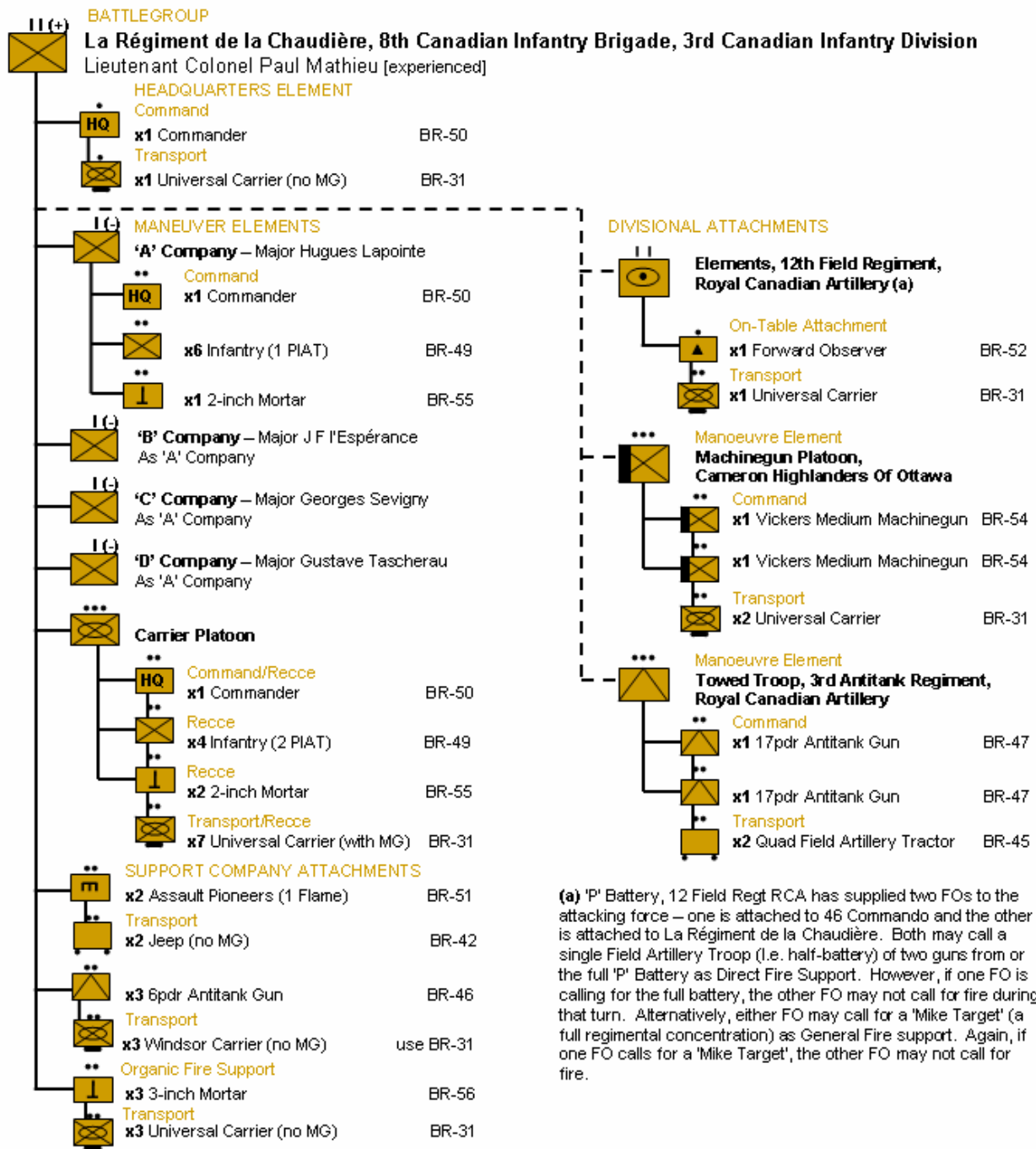


(a) It is worth noting that with the exception of 41 Royal Marine Commando, the units of Brigadier BW 'Jumbo' Leicester's 4th SS Brigade were all straight out of commando training, hence the 'veteran' rating as opposed to the usual 'élite' for commandos.

(b) Normally, S (Support) Troop of a Royal Marine Commando would be fielded as individual supporting attachments. However, on occasion they fought without their heavy weapons, as infantry. If desired, the Allied player may exchange any support weapons in S Troop for a Commando Infantry (BR-58) stand prior to the start of the game.

(c) 'P' Battery, 12 Field Regt RCA has supplied two FOs to the attacking force – one is attached to 46 Commando and the other is attached to La Régiment de la Chaudière. Both may call a single Field Artillery Troop (i.e. half-battery) of two guns from or the full 'P' Battery as Direct Fire Support. However, if one FO is calling for the full battery, the other FO may not call for fire during that turn. Alternatively, either FO may call for a 'Mike Target' (a full regimental concentration) as General Fire support. Again, if one FO calls for a 'Mike Target', the other FO may not call for fire.

Allied Reinforcements – Elements, 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade



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Deployment and Reinforcement Schedule

- Turn 1** Start of scenario. The main assault force arrives anywhere on the northern table edge.
- One Rifle Company of La Régiment Chaudière, plus the MG Platoon, the Antitank Troop and one 6pdr may be deployed dug-in on the Bray heights. (In the area bounded by the red line AB) These may not move until the bulk of La Régiment Chaudière arrives on turn 12, but may fire as normal.
- Turn 8** A second Rifle Company of La Régiment Chaudière arrives anywhere on the northern table edge or on table edge bounded by the red line AB. They may be moved normally.
- Turn 12** The remainder of La Régiment Chaudière arrives anywhere on table edge bounded by the red line AB. The forces deployed at Bray may now be released.
- Turn 24** End of scenario.

Note:

If short of time and models, simply limit the scenario to the attack of 46 Commando and therefore finish the scenario on turn 12. In this case, only the MG platoon, the antitank guns and the reinforcement company arriving on turn 8 need be included from La Régiment Chaudière.

Briefing for SS-Sturmbannführer Bernhard Krause, Commanding I. Bataillon/SS-Panzer-Grenadier- Regiment 26

Situation

Your battalion has been here in Rots for three days now with no appreciable gain. Eggert's 1. Kompanie seized the village on 8th June without much of a fight, though all attempts by the rest of the regiment to advance further into the Allied bridgehead have been beaten back with heavy loss. Consequently, you are in a rather precarious position, forming a salient in the line with British and Canadian units to the east, north, west and southwest of you.

The closest enemy positions are in Norrey-en-Bessin (across the Caen-Bayeux railway line) to the southwest, Bretteville l'Orgueilleuse to the west, Bray to the northwest and Rosel (down the Mue Valley) to the north. These are thought to belong to the 3rd Canadian Division and are unquestionably tough soldiers as the division has found to its cost. Thankfully, you are not totally isolated; the II Battalion of the regiment is positioned on your rear-left, facing Norrey-en-Bessin and Bretteville l'Orgueilleuse (where the smoking wrecks of Panthers cruelly remind you of the previous two attempts to take these villages), while Kurt Meyer's SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Regiment 25 is positioned at Carpiquet on your right. Max Wünsche's SS-Panzer-Regiment 12 supports the entire line.

The Regiment has temporarily detached 2. Kompanie and 3. Kompanie from your battalion. However, Fritz Guntrum's Begleit-Kompanie (Divisional Headquarters Escort Company), Hans Pfeiffer's 4. Panzer-Kompanie and a platoon of the regiment's 16. (Pionier) Kompanie have reinforced your depleted command.

Mission

You are to defend your positions at Rots and La Villeneuve, thus maintaining a flanking position for the regiment against the 3rd Canadian Division and defending the northern approaches to Carpiquet Airfield.

Execution

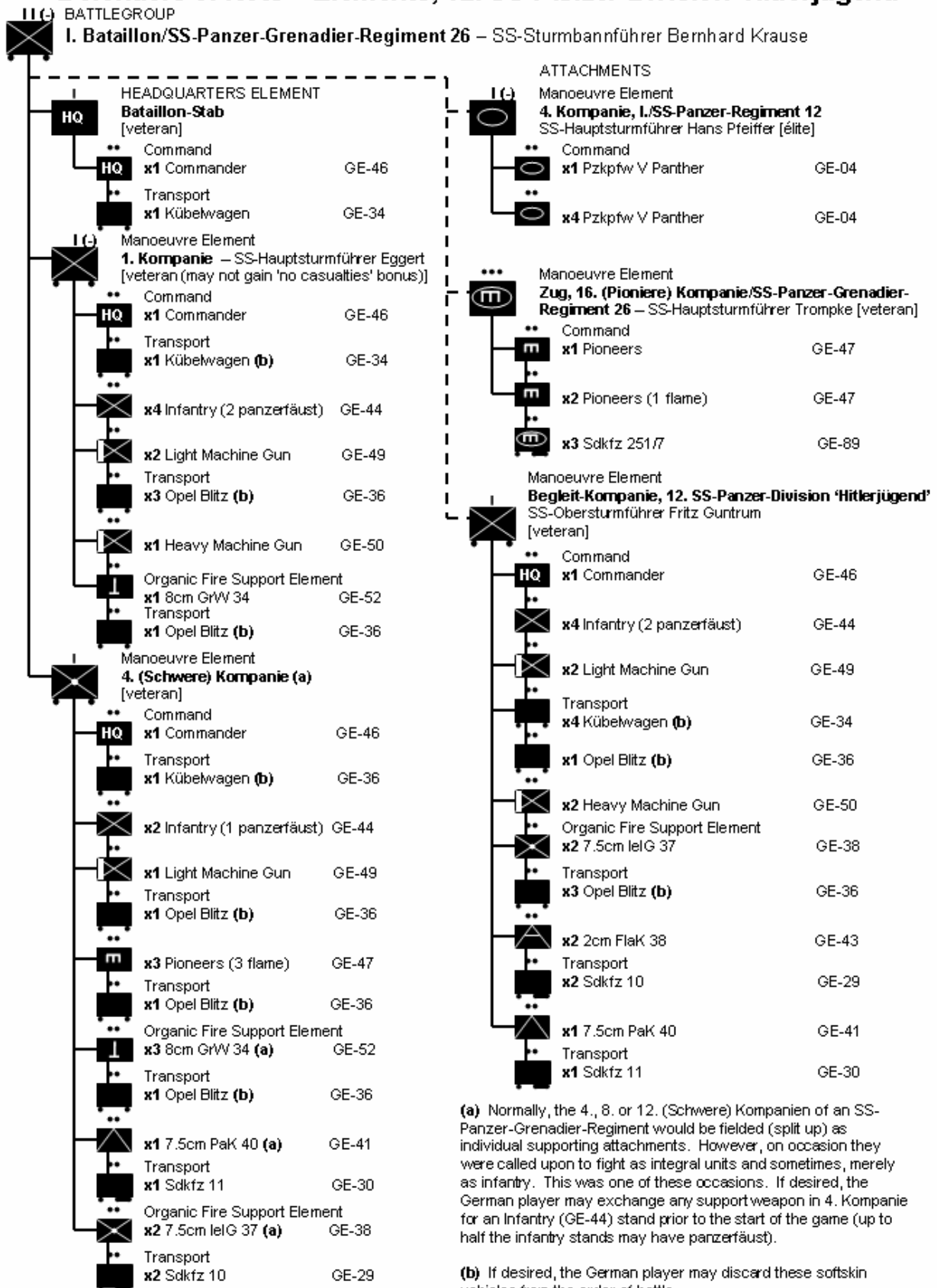
As the men of your 1. Kompanie are exhausted and depleted by three days of skirmishing with the Canadians, you have withdrawn them to the southern end of the position, alongside your command post in La Villeneuve, where they can get some well-earned rest. Consequently, you have had to place the 4. (Schwere) Kompanie (Heavy Support Weapons Company) in the forward positions – not an ideal situation.

You have placed the Escort Company in the château on the west bank of the River Mue, covering the approaches from Bretteville l'Orgueilleuse.

Pfeiffer has sent a platoon of Panthers to the 4. Kompanie in Rots and another platoon to the Begleit-Kompanie at the château, while the remainder of his Panthers are in reserve at your command post in La Villeneuve.

Suddenly, a massive barrage announces the launch of a Canadian attack. It is most intense to the west, around Norrey-en-Bessin, though shells are starting to fall ahead of you on the 4. Kompanie position in Rots. 4. Kompanie advises you that infantry are attacking up the valley in approximately in battalion strength, supported by tanks. Calls to Regiment and Division for fire support fall on deaf ears – they are far too busy to the south of Norrey. It looks like you are on your own.

Defenders of Rots – Elements, 12. SS-Panzer-Division ‘Hitlerjüngend’



Deployment and Reinforcements

Your battalion is deployed for all-round defence and is surprised by the Allied attack – it may not therefore be re-deployed before the start of the game and must be deployed as follows:

Elements of 4. Kompanie may be exchanged for infantry stands at a rate of one infantry stand per heavy weapon stand exchanged. This must be done prior to the start of the game and these stands may not be re-exchanged for heavy weapons during the game. All elements of this Kompanie must start the game dug-in within 8 inches of Rots with the exception of one forward observation point (Infantry only) which may start the game dug-in within 8 inches of Rots

Eggert's 1. Kompanie is exhausted and may not therefore receive the +1 manoeuvre modifier for having no casualties. It must start the game, along with the Pioniere, dug-in within 8 inches of La Villeneuve or Le Bourg.

The Begleit-Kompanie is dug-in within 8 inches of the Château and Le Hamel or Le Haut Rue.

Pfeiffer has one Panther hull-down within 8 inches of the Château, another hull-down within 8 inches of Rots and the remainder with his command tank hull-down within 8 inches of La Villeneuve or Le Bourg. Despite the Panthers being detached, they manoeuvre on Pfeiffer's Manoeuvre die roll; they may not be attached to the infantry MEs.

The Battalion HQ Element may deploy in any of the above deployment areas.

There are no German reinforcements.

Game Notes

The duration of the game is 24 turns. The Allied player moves first.

The following optional rules are recommended:

- Grazing fire
- Sneak manoeuvre action
- Engineer / improved position
- British artillery – replacement of FO casualties

Victory Conditions

	Canadian	German
Total	Take Rots, Le Hamel, La Haute Rue, La Villeneuve and Le Bourg and all bridges on the table. Leave no undisordered German element on the table.	Hold Rots Le Hamel and La Haute Rue and all the Mue crossings south of Lasson. Leave no undisordered Allied Armour on the southern half of the table.
Major	Take Rots, Le Hamel, La Haute Rue and all bridges on the table.	Hold Rots Le Hamel and La Haute Rue and all the Mue crossings south of Lasson.
Minor	Take Rots, Le Hamel and La Haute Rue and all Mue crossings north of the lake.	Hold Le Hamel and La Haute Rue and at least 2 Mue crossings north of the lake and south of Lasson

Balancing Options

Favouring Canadians

1. Reduce discipline rating of Pfeiffer's Panthers to experienced.
2. Advance the arrival of Canadian Reinforcements to turn 6 and 10 respectively.
3. Remove one 75mm IeIG and one 2cm Flak 38 from the Begleit-Kompanie.
4. Remove one LMG from 4. Kompanie.

Favouring Germans

1. Increase strength of 4. Panzer Kompanie by one model.
2. Delay the arrival of Canadian Reinforcements to turn 10 and 14 respectively.
3. Relax the deployment restrictions from 8 inches from the villages to 12 or 16 inches.
4. Reduce the Canadian force initially deployed on the Bray heights to remove the Anti-tank troop.