

Despair

Despite superior numbers and on the whole better equipment, during the Battle of France, the French Army largely due to outdated thinking and poor leadership collapsed within a period of six weeks. Within the battle there were often feats of bravery and resistance by small groups of French soldiers, their efforts being in vain and leaving them in despair over the collapse of France. Two 1/35th scale figures from the SKP figure range (an infantryman and gunner) epitomised this and gave rise to the idea for the title.



The completed diorama with all focus directed towards the two Frenchmen

In planning the scenario, the two figures were clearly to have been overwhelmed and forced into surrendering. The figures therefore had to be placed in an environment where their efforts of resistance were visible as the enemy closed around them.

Having recently gone through my kits, I had come across the Heller 25mm anti-tank gun kit which was widely used by the French but generally ineffective. Along with a Panzer T35 previously painted for another project, the scenario developed further into the two figures acting as the remnant of a French gun crew, having fought until out of ammunition against the Panzer and are forced into submission. Adding to this feeling of dejection, the capture of the two Frenchmen is overseen by a German officer who has not even taken the trouble to draw his weapon such is the demoralisation of the two “gunners”. The presence of the Panzer T35 as it passes its adversaries adds to the sense of defeat as the tank commander offers up a few choice words, having endured the gun’s fire.

In starting the diorama the first step was to lay out where the figures would be in relation to the key components. Having decided the infantryman with his hands raised would sit adjacent to the figure acting as the gunner, the placement of the gunner on the leg of the gun set the location and the centre of focus for the diorama.



The figure is pinned through the split leg and into the gunner to ensure a firm and secure location



The two principle characters, one slumped in despair, watched over by an officer so confident of his enemies defeat that he stands casually by smoking without having taken the trouble to draw a weapon

Despite its age, the Heller 25mm anti-tank gun kit has a reasonable level of detail and on the whole assembles easily. The attachment of the gun shields needed some care as the fixing point was relatively small and could leave the shield loose. Painted in a green/black camouflage pattern, the gun was weathered with a number of earth coloured pastel chalks and sealed with Windsor and Newton acrylic matt varnish.



A key element of the scene was that the ammunition was exhausted so the ammunition box in the kit was filed to thin all of the sides and lids. All the shells in the kit were cut down to represent empty cases.



The backdrop to the scene was a section of Verlinden's street scene. The section chosen included a water trough and garden wall. Cast in plaster, the gate was cut out and replaced with wood strips.



The trough was improved by cutting out the excess plaster and filling with gloss varnish after the wall was painted. A pump handle and feed pipe was added along with some accessories including a ladder and barrel.



The commander of the Panzer 35t was made up of a number of different parts from Dragon figures with a Hornet head added. Positioned to point and make clear his views he added the link between the tank and the gun crew. A five o'clock shadow added to the impression of time spent in the field without rest.



The figures being directed towards the prisoners are from an old Andrea set while the officer is from the Japanese maker Yushitaka Hirano released by Melster Chronicle Figures.



The tank was weathered with the same pastels used on the groundwork and a limited amount of stowage added. Unlike the later Russian campaign vehicles did not carry a huge load of stowage.





The finished diorama set out to show all of the elements coming together. The project, although simple in execution, proved enjoyable.