

# **SEND THREE and FOURPENCE:**

Bring up the PIAT! An interview with Mathew Moss  
by Conrad Kinch

I was able to catch up with the author of *The PIAT* Matthew Moss.

***Matthew, could you tell us a little about the PIATs role as an indirect fire anti-tank weapon? Surely that's unique amongst Second World War era weapons of that type?***

It's unique in that in its light mortar role the PIAT could drop its bombs indirectly, it's certainly something the US and German Rocket Launchers weren't capable of. The secondary indirect role was something that was quickly discovered and was later incorporated into the weapon's design with a mortar aiming line painted along the top and a quadrant sight added.

***Was the bomb more effective because it was landing on the top armour of a tank?***

The bomb certainly would have been more effective against thinner top armour but in the anti-tank role it would have been very difficult to score a hit, even with a spotter - as Major Cain discovered! The secondary light mortar role was often used against enemy defensive positions or in the 'housebreaking' role - which was essentially blowing holes in the walls of buildings during urban fighting.

***From reading the description of the incident, it seems the StuG had been stripped of its supporting infantry. There is something of the big game hunter stalking a tiger about it. Was it unusual to have a close range man versus tank engagement of that sort?***

It seems that in that later stage of the battle that German armour was at times operating *without* support, perhaps they felt they were unlikely to come up against a credible anti-armour threat with most of the British AT guns knocked out or out of ammo. But Cain was definitely very proactive in hunting down German AFVs. In terms of close range engagements they were surprisingly common with the PIAT. There are numerous accounts of troops being extremely close when opening fire to ensure they hit their mark. The PIAT did suffer from a limited range and it took real guts to deploy effectively, which explains why so many men were awarded medals for actions using it.

***Would all the ammunition carried by Major Cain have been HEAT?***

Yes, the PIAT was only ever issued with the standard HEAT round. Though they did experiment with developing other rounds such as a smoke round.

***Given that all the ammunition issued for the PIAT was likely to be HEAT. Did that handicap the PIATs performance as a light mortar? Would the effect be similar to something like a modern 40mm grenade or more like a 3 inch mortar shell?***

Good question. So from the accounts I found while researching the effect was described as quite effective. It's a significant amount of explosive so would have likely been closer to a mortar round than a modern 40mm grenade. They were certainly effective but not as effective as a standard mortar as their range and versatility was less than say a three inch mortar. They were widely used in Italy against German positions in the Po River Valley where artillery support couldn't always be used due to proximity of friendly forces.

***Thank you very much for your time. Now that you've got the Sterling and the PIAT under your belt, what will you be tackling next? Where else should we look out for your work?***

Always happy to bring up the PIAT! I'm currently in the early stages of working on a book about British submachine guns which will hopefully build on my work on the Sterling. I'm also pretty busy with my website *historicalfirearms.info* and my video documentary project *armourersbench.com* where we look at small arms, larger weapons and other military equipment. We'll have a series of videos and articles about the PIAT and other British spigot weapons on there in the coming months.