

Battalion Bits BT15: British Expeditionary Force (BEF) Matilda I

Battalion Bits

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Background

The British Army started the Second World War with two types of tanks; Cruiser tanks seen as armoured cavalry designed to engage other tanks, and Infantry tanks designed to act as support to infantry troops. In 1939, there were two infantry tanks in service, the small A.11 which was more like a movable machine gun position and the A.12, a larger tank with a 2 pdr gun. Both were heavily armoured.

The first version of the A.12 (Matilda I) differed from later versions in several areas. Because it was thought that it would be used in similar muddy conditions to WWI, it had its suspension raised by 6 inches, and was fitted with a tail skid to assist in trench crossing. The engine mufflers were inside the hollow skid. The co-axial mg was a Vickers watercooled 0.303 and the mantlet had a heavy armoured cover for the barrel. There was a steam vent on the turret roof for mg coolant.

The first versions of the Matilda had AEC engines, and the exhaust arrangement was different than on Matilda III and subsequent marks which used Leyland engines.

The Tamiya kit of the Matilda represents a Mk III/IV so it must be backdated to represent those Mk Is which were used by the BEF in France in 1940.

Before Assembly

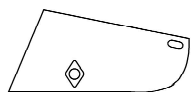
As with all resin sets, wash all the parts in a strong detergent and rinse in clear water to remove any oils or mould releases. Remove pour stubs and clean up the parts; use a mask when sanding resin and wet sand where possible. Cyanoacrylate adhesives work best but quickly; use five minute epoxy if joint requires manipulation while setting. These instructions follow the step-by-step kit instructions with variations where applicable.

Step 1, 2. As per kit instructions.

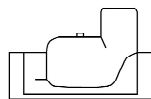
Step 3. Shorten the lower arms of part A20 by 0.1"(2.5 mm), including the mounts moulded on the hull rear. Sand that area flush. Cut two lengths of the 0.125" (3.2mm) square strip provided to 2.875" (73 mm) long. Glue this on top of the P12 suspension assemblies. Then, glue those assemblies to the hull. You can line the pins up with the sockets on the hull to make sure the assemblies are in the right position fore to aft.

Step 4, 5. As per kit instructions.

BT15 Parts



1. Tail Skid



2. Mantlet



3. Steam Outlet

Step 6. The raising of the suspension means one additional track link is required per side, but there are extra ones provided in the kit. Follow the kit instructions, but add an additional single link (P6) at the top front between the P8 and A2 section. I had a slight gap at this point even with the additional link, but this area is well hidden behind the side plates.

Step 7. The additional armour thickness in front of the driver's visor should be removed as this was a later feature. Carefully grind the area down so it is nearly flush with the front plate. This is also the time to fill in the mounting hole for the right side exhaust pipe on the rear deck, before you add the P9 armoured louvers. The rear overhang exhaust cutout (A4) on the right side can be replaced with a piece of plastic card of appropriate thickness. At the same time, fill in the slots on the overhang for the extra fuel tank which was not carried.

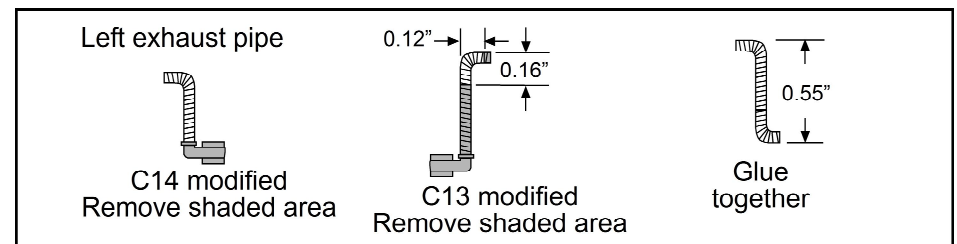
The early Matildas had forged tow rings (P4) which were somewhat more rounded than later welded plate ones, but to be honest this is hardly noticeable in this scale. If you want, open up the holes a bit and round off the sharp edges.

Step 8, 9. As per kit instructions.

Step 10. Not required, but keep parts C13 and C14 for later.

Step 11, 12. As per kit instructions.

Step 13. Glue on the tail skid, centred on the rear hull plate with the bottom of the skid flush with the bottom of the hull. Carefully remove the right exhaust pipe from part C8, and glue in place. You will need to fill in the mounting hole on the rear deck. Construct a new left exhaust pipe as shown below from kit parts C13 and C14. Glue it to C8 and the other end in the flange on the tail skid.



Where does that right exhaust pipe go, anyways?

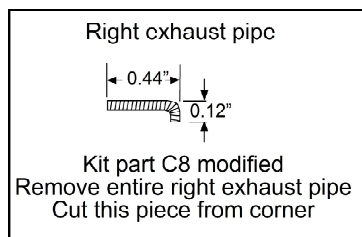
There are references which indicate the right exhaust pipe comes out on the bottom of the hull and runs along to the rear then comes up and goes into the flange on the side of the tail skid (and that is the configuration depicted in a 1/35 conversion). There are also references (Armour in Profile No. 15) which state that the right exhaust pipe exited through the rear hull plate and then into the tail skid. Since no

photo I have seen shows this area clearly, I chose to provide the second option. My reasoning is that the pipe running along for some distance under the hull would be extremely vulnerable to being torn off or flattened especially in the muddy conditions which required the entire suspension to be raised to provide additional ground clearance. However, I am prepared to be proven wrong, and furthermore if you disagree, you can make the exhaust arrangement however you wish.

Step 13 Continued.

On the other side of the tail skid, drill a 1/16" (1.5 mm) hole in the rear hull plate between the tail skid and the edge of the hull plate, about 0.1" (2.5 mm) up from the bottom. Use a corner piece from the exhaust pipe removed from part C8 as shown in the sketch at right and fit it between the flange on the right side of the tail skid, and the drilled hole. A little cut and fit and you're done.

Parts A21 are not required, but attach the number plate C7.



Step 14. The handles on the bottom of the access hatches on the side plates can be carefully removed without damaging surrounding detail. Cut a number of small squares from thin (0.020" or 0.5 mm) plastic strip, and glue these on the bottom centre of each access hatch. See the photo at right.

Steps 15, 16. As per kit instructions.

Step 17. Replace mantlet C21 with resin part. Drill a small hole at the end of the mg cover and fit a small piece of tubing to represent the mg barrel. Drill out the hole for the 2 pdr barrel and glue in place. The resin mantlet is not intended to use the poly caps so fit it inside the mantlet cover C22 and glue it in place.

Step 18. Turn the turret upside down and fill the hole under the turret ventilator with cyano glue and let dry. When set, turn the turret upright and the turret ventilator can be carefully removed without damaging other nearby detail. Complete the rest of step 18, but leave off the canvas sheets (C24 and C23).

Step 19. On the right front of the turret roof is a small round disc with four mounting bolts. This is the location for the resin machine gun cooling steam outlet. Remove the mounting flange of this small resin part; what remains is a sort of right-angled part. The rounded end sits on that small disc, and the squarish end hangs over the side of the turret. Do not fit the ammo boxes (parts P1).

Camouflage

According to Steve Zaloga, the BEF Matildas were painted in a two-tone disruptive scheme of Khaki Green and Dark Green. The Khaki green was fairly dark so there is little contrast between colours. I would suggest using the camo pattern as given in the kit instructions as a guide, but I am not so sure about the Tamiya colour mixes given.

Markings

This conversion supplies a decal sheet for five machines of the BEF, as confirmed by photos. Basic marking schemes consisted of the vehicle name on the rear hull plate between towing rings, and on the forward end of the angled plates beside the driver. On the after end of those plates was the vehicle serial number (T over the serial number). On the rear number plate on a black background (C7) was the vehicle registration number. Some vehicles had a white square in the middle of the upper hull plate below the turret (seems like an 'Aim Here' marking) and sometimes on the rear hull plate or on the rear of the trench skid. I assume these were convoy markings.

The various schemes presented are:

GAMECOCK	T-6736	PMV-92
(White squares on upper hull sides)		
GOAT	T-6750	PMV-106
(White square to right of tow ring on rear plate, and upper hull sides)		
GOOD LUCK	T-6751	PMV-107
(White square to right of tow ring on rear plate, and upper hull sides)		
GREYNA	T-6758	PMV-114
(Only example seen of serif lettering)		
GREENOCK	T-6909	PMV-265
(White square on centre of tail skid rear plate, and upper hull sides)		

On this last tank, there was an additional marking consisting a black and white striped disc (the stripes were at 45 degrees, lower left to upper right) and the disc was about mid-way up the turret, just to the left of the map case (part C42).

