



Tank and infantry training at Zhurihe Base



Type-79 tank



Type-99 tank



Type-63 tank



Type-96A tank



Type-15 light tank

GRIT AND VALOUR ON BEASTS OF WAR

DISHAN JOSEPH

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) of China has made significant growth in the area of its armoured fighting vehicles. The first tanks and armoured cars in the Chinese inventory were whatever imports they could acquire and some armoured vehicles they fashioned, as China had few factories to build them. The use of tanks along with artillery in the People's Liberation Army was generally less in the formative years of the Armoured Corps. The training of armoured forces along with artillery crews was somewhat rudimentary.

Engaging battle tanks in combat operations usually includes indirect fire, targeting and observation, fire and manoeuvre, counter-battery fire and barrage fire. The Chinese use of Armoured Fighting Vehicles (AFV) prior to 1943 suffered from many of the same problems as that of the artillery, and most of China's small inventory of AFVs were lost in combat or became non-operational due to lack of maintenance and spare parts.

Armour was not used in large scale, but in an infantry support role exclusively. In October 1950, Mao Zedong made the decision to send the People's Volunteer Army into Korea during the Korean War; Chinese Army infantrymen fighting there were backed up with Soviet-made heavy weapons, including T-34 tanks. During the early 1950s, China began producing copies of the Soviet T-34 tank and established its own manufacturing plants to build further improved designs.

When the Type-59 Main Battle Tank (MBT) was being developed, it became apparent that because of the high weight of the tank it would have difficulties operating in areas of southern China. These areas mostly consist of mountain ranges, hills, rice paddy fields, lakes and multiple rivers without a bridge that could support the weight of Type-59 MBT. In the late 1950s, the PLA Ground Force submitted requirements for a light tank that could be successfully deployed in the areas of southern China. The development of the Type-62 light tank began at the 674 Factory in 1958.

The tank crews of the People's Liberation Army train at the Zhurihe Training Base located in Inner Mongolia, almost 400 km from Beijing. This is the largest military base in China covering an area of 1,066 square kilometres. It has been used for division level combined tactical training for the past 60 years and is home to the 81st Army Group. Defence analysts believe this is the largest military training base in Asia.

TYPE-59 TANK

The Type-59 (Chinese industrial designation: WZ120) MBT is a Chinese produced version of the Soviet T-54A tank. The Type-59 was the first Chinese built tank. It was fitted with a 100mm rifled gun. The first vehicles were produced in 1958 and it was accepted into service in 1959, with serial production beginning in 1963. Approximately 9,500 of the tanks were produced by the time production ended in 1980 with approximately 5,500 serv-



Tanks engage in beach landing

ing with the Chinese Armed Forces. It can travel up to 50 kmph. The tank formed the backbone of the Chinese People's Liberation Army into the 21st century.

TYPE-62 TANK

The Norinco Type-62 is a Chinese light tank developed in the early 1960s and is based on the Type 59 with a reduced main gun caliber, lighter armour and a smaller suite of electronics to help reduce weight. It had been upgraded to modern standards to provide the PLA with a dependable light tank. An 85mm gun forms its primary armament. The building of the first Type-62 light tank prototype, Type 59-16, began in 1960 and ended in 1962. The tank officially entered production and service with the People's Liberation Army in 1963.

TYPE-63 TANK

The Norinco Type-63 is a People's Liberation Army amphibious light tank developed in the early 1960s and first fielded in 1963. It was developed from experience with the earlier Soviet PT-76 which had been produced in China. The Chinese obtained a few PT-76 amphibious light tanks in the mid-1950s. In October 1958, the PLA decided to develop an indigenous amphibious tank based on the PT-76 design. This light tank has an 85mm gun and weighs 18 tons.

TYPE-80/88 TANK

The Type-80 is a series of second-generation MBTs from China. It has a crew of four. The first Type-80 MBT was based on the older Type-79 MBT hull, but equipped with new Chinese-made wheels/tracks, 730 hp diesel engine, British-designed dual-axis stabilized fire-control with laser range-finder, and NATO-standard 105mm rifled gun. Its

secondary armament is a 7.62mm machine gun. The improved version of this tank later entered service in 1988 under the PLA designation of Type-88. The tanks have an operational range of 400 kilometres.

TYPE-96 TANK

The Type-96 features a more powerful engine, improved electronics and a western-style turret. The Type-96 was developed from a Type 85-1M prototype with a 780-hp diesel engine and explosive reactive armour (ERA), and expertise gained from the Type-85 such as the modular armour design. This version was accepted by the PLA in 1996, and entered service in 1997. Production of the Type-88 stopped when the Type-96 became available, and the Type-96 battle tank was mass-produced in larger numbers than the Type-88.

TYPE-99 TANK

The Type-99 hunter-killer tank was developed from the 9910 tank. This is a third generation MBT fielded by the Chinese Army weighing 55 tons. It is made to compete with other modern tanks. It is currently the most advanced MBT fielded by China.

The website ArmyTechnology.com considers the ZTZ99 MBT to be one of the 12 best tanks in the world and is a successor to the Type-88 tank manufactured for the People's Liberation Army. Three main versions of the Type-99 have been deployed – the Type-99 prototype, Type-99, and Type-99A – incorporating improved weapons' system, new active protection system, and advanced electronics.

This formidable tank is fitted with a 125mm smoothbore gun with ATGM capacity (anti-tank guided missile). The tank can

carry 42 rounds. The DTW ammunition can penetrate 700mm of rolled armour at 1,000 metres. The missile has a range of 5,000 metres during daylight. Secondary armament consists of 12.7mm machine gun. The tank's Fire Control system includes a ballistic computer and laser range finder. The tank can travel at an off road speed of 60 kmph. With its fording kit, the Type-99 tank can cross water up to five metres in depth. The chief designer of this tank is Zhu Yusheng. This is the first tank in the work to use active protection technology augmented with a laser warning receiver system. Its counter measures include the ability to damage enemy optic sensors.

TYPE-15 TANK

The Type-15 Black Panther is a new tank made by Norinco that entered service in 2018. It is the successor to the Type-62 light tank. It is used by the PLA Ground Force and Navy Marines. The Marines can enhance their beach landing by using tanks to engage the enemy. The Black Panther weighs 33 tons. It is fitted with a fully stabilized 105mm gun. Its navigation system is augmented with satellite communications. The tank has steel armour protection with layers of composite armour. Due to its light weight two tanks can be airlifted at once on a Chinese Air Force Y-20 heavy transport aircraft. In this manner they achieve a long-range deployment of 7,800 kilometres. The Air Force can also drop this battle tank by parachute. The new tank is complete with oxygen generators for high altitude terrain operations.

The People's Liberation Army has steadily created and empowered a formidable armoured fighting force.