

JAPANESE MEDIUM TANK TYPE 97 CHI-HA

1/35 MILITARY MINIATURE SERIES


TAMIYA

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Type 97 Medium Tank

The Type 97 medium tank was a typical tank of the Japanese Army and shared hardships with tank men before and throughout World War II in the Pacific theatre including China and the Kurile Islands.

Its well-proportioned low silhouette, aerial spread around the vehicle top, unsymmetrical turret, complicated body front, seesaw-type suspension system, etc. combined to give the tank unique beauty that clearly distinguished it from other tanks.

The Type 97 medium tank was planned in 1936 as a new main tank for infantry support to take the place of the existing Type 89 medium tank. In those days, the Japanese Army was divided into two in opinion as to what sort of a new tank to make. The high command and military administration hoped to have small, light and un-expensive tanks as many as possible, while fighting troops needed heavier tanks of satisfactory

performance. Since both of them held fast to their own opinion, it was decided to make and study two different experimental tanks. This was a rare case very different from the conventional practice of showing the same specifications to several competitors and having them make their own experimental vehicle.

To distinguish between them, the heavier tank insisted upon by the fighting troops was given the secret code of "Chi-Ha" and the lighter tank needed by the military authorities was coded "Chi-Ni". "Chi" is an abbreviation of "Chusen-sha" which means medium tank. "Ha" and "Ni" correspond to "C" and "D" respectively, showing the order of design. Thus, the "Chi-Ha" means medium tank designed in the third place and the "Chi-Ni" stands for medium tank designed in the fourth place.

In 1937, the Tokyo Plant of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd., completed an experimental vehicle of the "Chi-Ha" and Osaka Arsenal completed that of the "Chi-Ni".

The advantages and disadvantages of the two types had already been clear from their design drawings. Therefore, the discord of opinion at the design stage remained unchanged even when the experimental vehicles were completed. In the meantime, the Chinese-Japanese War broke out on 7th July, 1937 and peacetime budgetary limitations were removed. At last, the "Chi-Ha" was accepted as a new medium tank to be produced. In June 1937, some weeks before that, the "Chi-Ha" was tested at Army Tank School in Chiba. The "Chi-Ha" at stage, like the later German Panther and Tiger tanks, had road wheels in staggered arrangement and was very different in shape from the production model.

Running trials on steep slopes proved that the tracks were liable to get out of position, and the "Chi-Ha" was to undergo improvements immediately.

To prevent it, two measures were taken: One was to replace two central road wheels by conventional double wheels. The other was to replace all the road wheels by double ones. The two improved versions, still different in spring arrangement from the production model, were put to tests in January 1938. Officially accepted for production was the design whose 1st and 6th road wheels were independently sprung.

The "Chi-Ha" officially designated Type 97 medium tank was a well-shaped, modern vehicle quite unlike the Type 89 medium tank.

The Type 97 medium tank was equipped with a 57 mm gun type 97, which was the same in calibre as the main gun type 90 of the Type 89 medium tank but was of the Type 97, not of the conventional type 90. As secondary armament, the vehicle carried two 7.7 mm heavy machine guns of the Type 97, one on the frontal left of the body and the other on a ball mount in the rear of the turret. The latter machine gun could be remounted at the top of the turret for anti-air purpose.

The vehicle carried 114 rounds of main-gun ammunition and 4,035 rounds of machine-gun ammunition.

The main gun was 18.4 calibres long. Muzzle velocity for shells was no more than 355.3 m/



