

PLA's new light tank is unveiled

China has confirmed the deployment of a new light tank, which observers say will suit combat operations on plateaus.

A photo of the tank on snowy ground is on display at an exposition in the Beijing Exhibition Center, as part of a display showing achievements made by China over the past five years. The caption accompanying the picture says it is a new type of light tank, without giving details.

This is the first time the Chinese military has officially published a picture of the tank.

Almost all of the military equipment on display at the exhibition is in active service with the People's Liberation Army. A number of pictures taken by military enthusiasts and circulated on Chinese defense websites show a row of the new tanks being transported by rail. Those tanks had been painted with a tactical code on the turret – an indication of delivery to the PLA Ground Force.

At a Defense Ministry news briefing in late June, Senior Colonel Wu Qian, ministry spokesman, confirmed that the light tank was being tested at that time on plateaus in the Tibet autonomous region.

Developed by China North Industries Group Corp, the country's biggest maker of land armaments, the light tank is equipped with a hydropneumatic suspension system that ensures good maneuverability and survivability in mountainous regions.

Its main weapon is a 105-mm gun that is able to fire both shells and guided missiles, according to weapons observers, who said the tank's main task is to fight on plateaus even at very low temperatures and that its weight ranges from 25 to 35 metric tons. By comparison, a main battle tank, such as the United States' M1 Abrams and China's Type 99A, weighs up to 65 tons.

Du Wenlong, an equipment researcher at the PLA Academy of Military Science, said the vehicle was designed to operate in China's southern regions and on plateaus.

"The shortage of oxygen on plateaus means its engine must be very powerful and can work well with a limited amount of oxygen," he said. "Similarly, its power, fire control and ammunition systems must have been specially designed for high altitudes."

Ge Lide, a defense technology researcher at PLA National Defense University, said that while the tank falls into the light-duty category, its combat capability is strong, considering its firepower, mobility, defensive features and information capacity.

He noted that the tank would be capable of moving through many kinds of tough terrain and should be able to outperform all other PLA tanks and armored

vehicles off-road.

In addition to the domestic version, China has also developed a light tank for export. The VT-5, which China North Industries Group Corp calls the most advanced light tank available in the international market, has a maximum weight of 36 tons, and is armed with a 105-mm rifled tank gun, according to the company.

China developed the Type 62 light tank in the 1960s and had used it in its armored forces in southern regions for more than 50 years until retiring them in 2013.