



## Situation Report

**Main Image:**  
A Type 74 tank of the Tank School Unit's 3rd Company. Gradual retirement of the 74TK began in 1999, though 605 units are still in service. It's 720hp engine provides a top speed of 53km/h

# JGSDF

## IN THE LAND OF THE RISING SUN

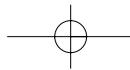
Report & Pictures by Gordon Arthur

When Japan entered WWII with its sudden strike against Pearl Harbour on 7th December 1941, the Imperial Japanese Army consisted of 51 divisions and 1,700,000 men. By the end of the war in 1945, the army had grown to 5.5 million soldiers in 145 divisions. It established its credentials by swiftly advancing across the Pacific to the very thresholds of India and Australia. Obviously, Japan's final defeat brought about the disbandment of its armed forces to prevent any repeat of its militaristic ambitions.

However, it was not long before Japan was allowed, and even encouraged, by the American supervisory GHQ to re-establish a viable military force. The catalyst for this was the Korean War.



Due to the hefty price tag of almost six million US\$, Type 89 Fighting Vehicle (89FV) production by Mitsubishi has been no more than six per year. Main armament is an Oerlikon Contraves 35mm KOE cannon



**1:** Main armament of the Type 74 is a rifled 105mm gun. It has an elevation range of -6° to +12°, which can be extended to -12° to +15° by employing the tank's hybrid hydro-pneumatic suspension

**2:** The Toyota HMV (High Mobility Vehicle) introduced in 1993 is a little similar in appearance to the American Hum-vee. It has a top speed of 105km/h powered by a 150hp 4.1-litre turbo-diesel engine

**3:** This 6x6 vehicle is a Type 87 Reconnaissance Combat Vehicle (RCV). It features an Oerlikon Contraves 25mm KBA automatic cannon and 7.62mm Type 74 MG mounted in the turret

**4:** This soldier, wearing a summer pattern camouflage uniform, holds a 7.62mm Type 64 assault rifle. It weighs 4.4kg and uses a 20-round magazine. It is being replaced by the newer 5.56mm Type 89

When Communist-backed North Korea suddenly attacked the South on 25th June 1950, the first US soldiers despatched to Korea to contain the threat were those stationed in Japan on

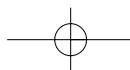


occupation duties. They were soon followed by further American and United Nations troops. With fears that the Communists would continue flexing their military muscles in the region and invade Japan, the USA instructed the Japanese government to establish its own armed forces. Thus the Police Reserve Force was formed in 1950.

Just a few years later under the 1954 Self-Defence Forces Law, the Police Reserve Force evolved into the Japanese Self-Defence Force (JSDF) with its three Ground, Air and Maritime

components (JGSDF, JASDF and JMSDF respectively). Article 9 of the 1947 Constitution of Japan states, "Japanese people renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation" and "land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained". The nomenclature 'Self-Defence Force' was thus a deliberate attempt to sidestep the fact that Japan had once again formed a viable army, navy and air force.

During the Cold War, the greatest threat was deemed to be a Soviet invasion



**Situation Report**



5

5: An AH-1S Cobra, soon to be replaced by the AH-64JP Apache, descends at Camp Fuji in the summer of 2007. Typical weapons are BGM-71 TOW missile launchers and 17-tube Hydra 70 rocket pods



6

6: Type 90 tank of the 5th Company of the Fuji Tank School Unit thunders across the black volcanic soil. It is armed with a licensed 44-calibre 120mm smoothbore gun designed by Rheinmetall



7

7: A column of Light Armoured Vehicles (LAV) at the Fuji Tank School. Similar to the French VBL, the LAV was built to give soldiers greater mobility with a degree of armoured protection



8

8: The 13.6-ton Type 82 Command and Communications Vehicle (CCV) was Japan's first wheeled armoured vehicle since WWII. Komatsu built 232 of these 8-man command vehicles up until 1999



9

9: The FR-70 towed howitzer, seen behind a Mitsubishi Type 74 Truck is the JGSDF's primary field gun. A total of 479 were license-produced by Japan Steel Works between 1983 and 2001



10

10: Infantrymen descend from a CH-47J produced under license by Kawasaki Heavy Industries. The JGSDF also fields the CH-47JA with enlarged fuel tanks offering a range of 1,000km



11

11: The 26.5-ton 89FV is powered by a 600hp diesel engine that moves it at speeds of up to 70km/h. Crew is 3+7. On either side of the turret are launchers for Type 79 anti-tank missiles



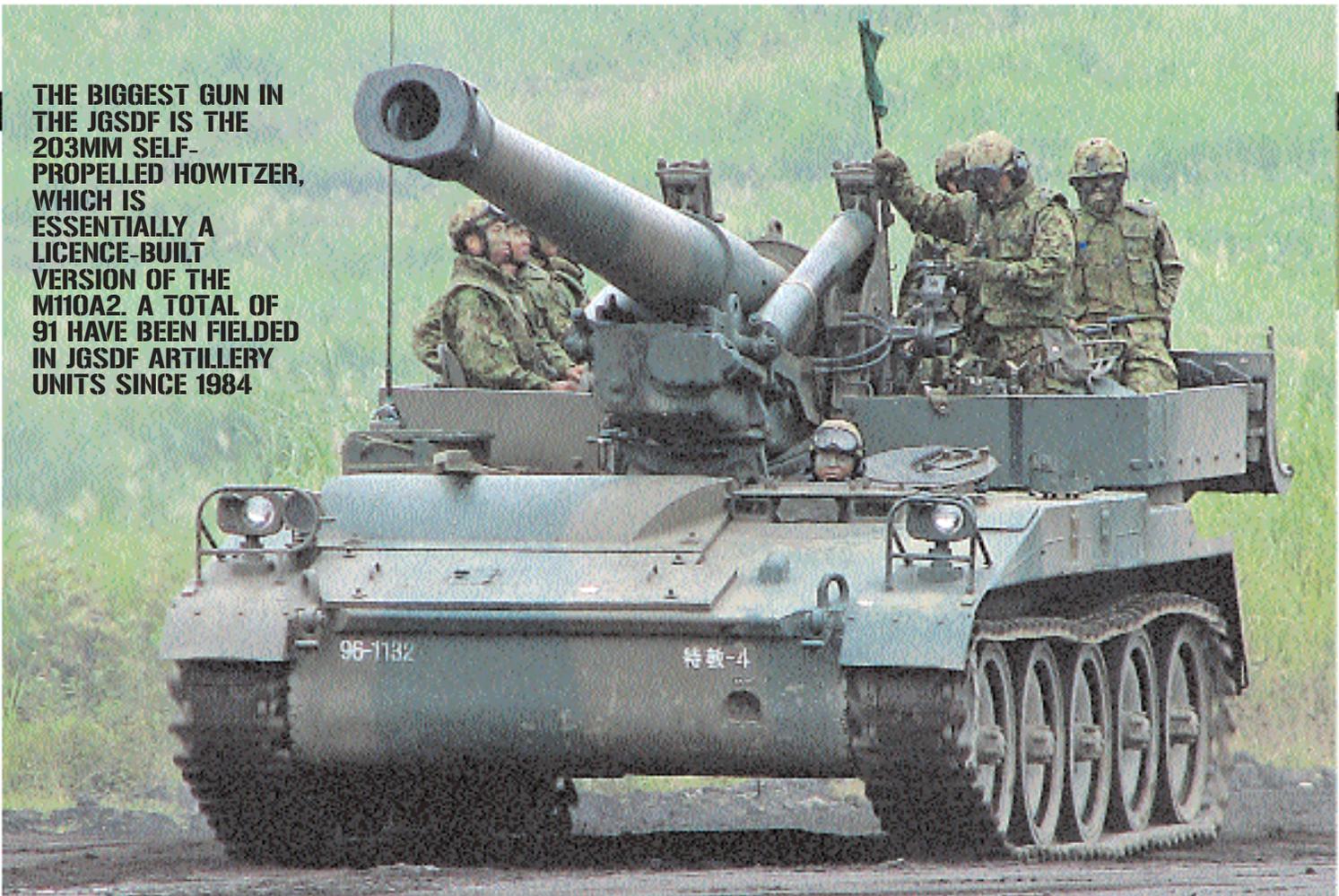
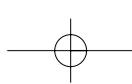
12

12: The 40-tonne Type 99 Self-Propelled Howitzer (99SP) is the newest howitzer in the JGSDF. The 52-calibre 155mm gun fitted with an autoloader has a maximum firing range of over 30km

that would likely have struck the northern island of Hokkaido first. To counter this threat, heavy armoured vehicles like the Type 90 Tank and Type 89 Fighting Vehicle were produced, many of which were stationed in Hokkaido. However, the dissipation of the Cold War threat in 1989 brought new challenges for Japan. There was concern over North Korea, as well as territorial island disputes with China and South Korea.

This led to a requirement for lighter and more mobile forces.

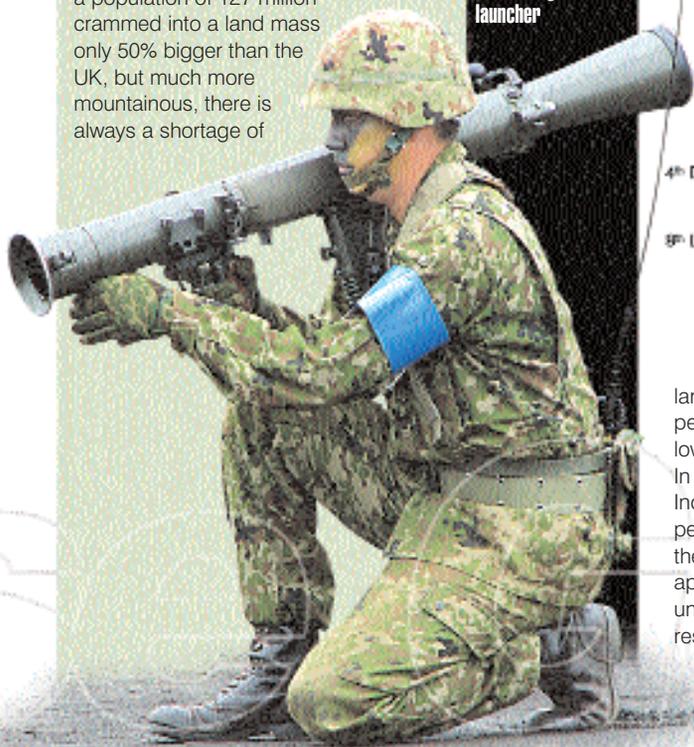
In Japan there has been public apathy, sometimes even antipathy, towards the military since WWII. This has meant recruitment is a constant problem as the JSDF must compete against the well-paying private sector in order to enlist qualified personnel. Thus there is a shortage of servicemen,



**THE BIGGEST GUN IN THE JGSDF IS THE 203MM SELF-PROPELLED HOWITZER, WHICH IS ESSENTIALLY A LICENCE-BUILT VERSION OF THE M110A2. A TOTAL OF 91 HAVE BEEN FIELDIED IN JGSDF ARTILLERY UNITS SINCE 1984**

units are often not fully manned, and there is a high ratio of officers to enlisted personnel. Another side effect is that personnel from more rural areas like Hokkaido and Kyushu tend to be disproportionately better represented in the armed forces than those recruited from cities like Tokyo. Training areas are also a continual headache for Japanese soldiers. With a population of 127 million crammed into a land mass only 50% bigger than the UK, but much more mountainous, there is always a shortage of

**Below Right: This soldier aims a Carl Gustav 84mm light rocket launcher, a weapon manufactured under license by Howa Machinery since 1984. The JGSDF uses HEAT and HE rounds in the 16.1kg launcher**



suitably sized training areas.

The latest chapter in the history of the JSDF was written on 9th January 2007 when a full governmental Ministry of Defence was formed. Though the JSDF is competent and professional, it is not overly

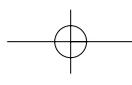


**Figure 1**

large - indeed Japan's ratio of military personnel to the overall population is lower than that of any NATO member. In the Asian region, only India and Indonesia have a lower ratio of personnel under arms. The JGSDF is the largest of the three branches, with approximately 148,000 personnel in uniform. The defence of Japan is the responsibility of five regional armies (Northern, North-eastern, Eastern, Central and Western) as shown in Figure 1. Japan relies heavily on a

close military alliance fostered with the USA since the end of WWII. A substantial number of American troops are permanently stationed on Japanese soil, including III MEF of the USMC in Okinawa, the US Navy's Seventh Fleet at Yokosuka, plus the two major USAF bases of Misawa and Kadena.

The JSDF has strict constitutional checks and balances, and it is only in recent years that Japanese personnel



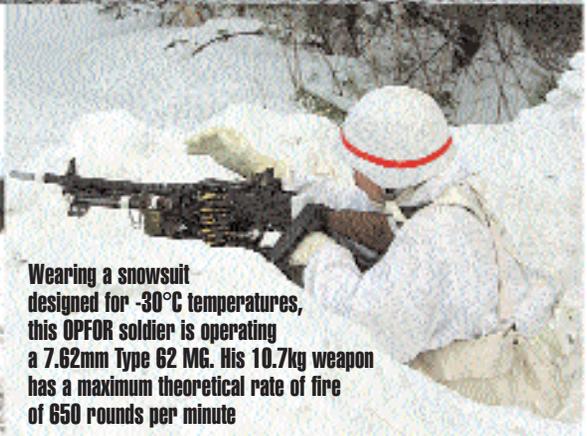
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Development of the 14.5-ton Type 96 Wheeled APC (WAPC) began in 1992. Around 25 units had been built by Komatsu by the end of 2006. It accommodates eight personnel plus a crew of two

13



Wearing a snowsuit designed for -30°C temperatures, this OPFOR soldier is operating a 7.62mm Type 62 MG. His 10.7kg weapon has a maximum theoretical rate of fire of 650 rounds per minute

have been allowed to deploy on peacekeeping missions to places like Iraq. The JGSDF is currently organised with one armoured and nine infantry divisions, as well as one airborne brigade, two combined-arms brigades, one artillery brigade, two air-defence brigades, one helicopter brigade, and four training brigades.

Japan possesses a fascinating array of armoured vehicles, the majority of which have been designed and produced domestically in an effort to advance the country's defence industry. This is sometimes done through licensed production but, wherever possible, Japan produces its own designs. The Constitution of Japan forbids it from exporting weapons and weapon technology, so this has resulted in the JGSDF fielding a lot of equipment that is found in no other country. Indeed, the only vehicles the JGSDF has in common with its allies



14

are the MLRS, M110 self-propelled howitzer and FH-70 towed howitzer.

However, Japan faces difficulties in its weapons programmes. Because the

**13:** This is a Type 78 'Snowcat', operated only by units stationed in northern Japan where snowfalls are heavy. The 6-ton vehicle is not armoured and can transport up to twelve troops or 1,000kg of cargo

**14:** This soldier of the 9th Infantry Division braves a snowstorm during the combined Japan-US Exercise NORTH WIND. Type 73 Jeep behind is gradually being replaced by a militarised version of the Mitsubishi Pajero

nation forbids the export of military hardware, the result is small production runs and vehicles produced at a slow rate, with correspondingly higher costs per unit. Even licensed production increases costs in the order of 20-30 percent. The JGSDF also tends to introduce new weapons rather than upgrade existing ones, as most other countries prefer to do. Another challenge is the bewildering variety of vehicles in service, with a lack of commonality in parts. Mitsubishi Heavy Industries generally produces tracked armoured vehicles, while Komatsu specialises in wheeled armoured vehicles. These two companies hold a virtual monopoly that is difficult for competing companies to break.

Japan's annual defence budget of approximately US\$45 billion makes it the fifth largest military spender in the world, about 50percent of which is spent on weaponry, armaments and supplies. This article offers readers a look at a fascinating selection of some equipment used by the modern Japanese soldier in the Land of the Rising Sun.