

AUSTRALIAN ARMY

LEOPARD TANK

Introduction

In 1977, the Leopard AS 1 Main Battle Tank entered service with the Royal Australian Armoured Corps as a replacement to the Centurion Tank. 103 vehicles were purchased, comprising of 90 Main Battle Tanks, 5 Bridge-layers and 8 Armoured Recovery Vehicles. This allowed the equipping of a full regular armoured regiment, a training school complement, vehicles for technical training of maintenance personnel as well as a pool for exchange and repair.

Leopard AS1 Described

The Leopard AS1 (AS is the NATO abbreviation for Australia). The vehicles were manufactured by Krauss Maffei in Germany and the Main Battle Tanks carry the factory hull numbers 17001 to 17091. During Australian service, the Main Battle Tanks carried the Army Registration Numbers (ARN) 27706 to 27781, and 29386 to 29399. The vehicle is powered by a Daimler Benz V10 diesel engine developing 610 kW, which drives through a ZF automatic gearbox with four forward and two reverse gears. The power pack is a tropical version of the standard unit allowing operation at 50°C ambient temperature. Speeds of up to 62 km/hr can be attained. Standard torsion bar suspension with seven road wheel stations and four track support rollers (return rollers) each side provide the tanks excellent cross country mobility. Diehl double pin track is fitted. The driver sits on the right side of the hull, and has a floor escape hatch as well as his swinging roof hatch.

The turret is of all welded construction with spaced armour, providing increased protection levels over the original cast turret. A British - designed 105mm L7A3 gun with thermal jacket and fume extractor is the main armament of the Leopard AS1. The laser range finder operates through an aperture on the right of the mantelet - there is no corresponding opening on the left. The sensors provide data to the computer on air temperature and pressure, charge temperature, barrel wear, cross wind and vehicle cant. The cross wind sensor is mounted on the forward part of the turret roof, surrounded by a round wire cage for protection. The commander has a panoramic sight, mounted on the turret roof forward of his cupola. Two 7.62 mm machine guns are carried - one is co-axial with the main armament, the other can be mounted on the commander's or loaders cupola, and in both positions it can be used in the anti-aircraft role. The gunner and commander sit on the right side of the turret, with the loader occupying the left side. A searchlight is carried in one of the armoured bins at the rear of the turret, and can be mounted on top of the left side of the mantelet.

In Service Use

The first major exercise involving the Leopard was at the Woomera range area in South Australia in 1977, and since that time it has been deployed all around Australia during exercises. It has operated in the dust and mud of Puckapunyal in summer and winter; in the jungles of northern Queensland and the hot interior of the Northern Territory. In 1995, the 1st Armoured Regiment moved from Puckapunyal in Victoria to Palmerston, south of Darwin, in the Northern Territory. Since that time, there has been a regiment's worth of Leopard stationed in northern Australia. In July 2007 the Leopard fleet of vehicles was withdrawn from service following the introduction into service of the Abrams M1A1 Tank. Decommissioning and disposal of the Leopard fleet followed in Darwin, Puckapunyal and Bandiana. Of the 103 Leopard vehicles, 30 Main Battle Tanks were gifted by the Commonwealth of Australia to Veterans Organisations throughout the country. The remaining vehicles have been allocated to various defence establishments for a range of different purposes.

Technical Data

Crew	4 comprising, Commander, Gunner, Loader/Operator and Driver
Weight (combat laden)	42 400 kg
Length	9.54 metres (gun forward)
Width	3.37 metres
Height	2.62 metres (top of sight)
Ground Clearance	0.44 metres
Main Armament	105mm L7A3 QF gun
Ammunition	59 rounds (17 in turret and 42 in hull)
Machine Guns	7.62mm MG2A1 Co-axial 7.62mm MG3 externally on cupola
Smoke Dischargers	Four 76mm on each side of turret
Engine	Daimler Benz MB838 V10 cylinder Four stroke diesel 610 kW (830hp) at 2200 rpm
Gearbox	ZF 4 HP 250 with four forward speeds and two reverse speeds
Fuel Capacity	950 litres
Maximum speed	62 km/hr
Range	500 km
Maximum Vertical obstacle	0.91 metres
Maximum trench	3 metres
Maximum fording depth unprepared	1.2 metres
Maximum fording depth prepared	4 metres

Dedication Service

Forster Tuncurry RSL Sub Branch conducted a Leopard Tank Dedication Service on Australia Day 26th January, 2011 involving the following dignitaries:

Bob Baldwin – Member for Paterson
Jan McWilliams – Mayor of Great Lakes
Ted Tisdale – President of the RSL Sub Branch
Graeme Kernick – Secretary of the RSL Sub Branch
Daryl Moran – Padre

This Leopard Tank was a gift from the Commonwealth of Australia to the Forster Tuncurry RSL Sub Branch and the local community.

