

RUMBLE IN THE JUNGLE



Rick Lawler
presents the
*Finemolds Type
97 'Chi-Ha'*.

The Type 97 was the Japanese army's standard medium tank during World War II. Like its predecessors, the Type 97 was intended primarily for an infantry support role. In 1939 skirmishes with Soviet forces along the Manchurian border proved that the Chi-Ha's short-barreled 57mm cannon was not effective against enemy armour. To remedy the situation a new version of the Type 97 was ordered which was equipped with a new turret mounting a more powerful high-velocity 47mm gun with good penetrating power. However, the improved Type 97 did not enter service until 1942 due, in part, to complacency in the army after early victories in China and Manchuria, as well as later victories in Malaya, Burma, and the Dutch East Indies. As the Pacific War progressed the Type 97 soon found itself outclassed

by the better-armed Allied tanks, such as the M4 Sherman. This resulted in an increased use of the Type 97 deployed as bunkers and pillbox fortifications.

Out of the Box

This is my first experience with building a Finemolds kit, and I must say that I really enjoyed the experience. Perhaps not quite as many fancy features are included in the box as with some marquee brand kits, nevertheless this kit certainly lends itself to a very fine rendition of this important Japanese tank. The overall fit of the parts is good, with a nice level of detail and crispness. Included within the box are vinyl tracks, clear parts for





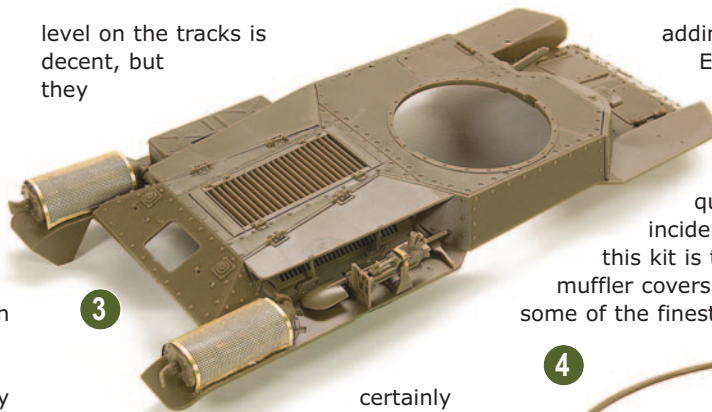
the headlamp and vision blocks, and super nice photo etch for the muffler guards. This kit represents the Type 97 'Chi-Ha' with additional front and turret armour, as well as the 57mm cannon as found on the earlier production models.

Work begins, as usual, with cleaning the road wheels. They have nice detailing on the face of the wheels, although lack any interior detailing which can become noticeable if viewed from certain angles. The suspension springs on the lower hull are well represented by multi-part assemblies.

A set of aftermarket tracks would be one alternative, but I decided to make this a true Out of the Box build - including using the vinyl tracks.

The detail

level on the tracks is decent, but they



certainly lack the necessary appearance of weight, or track sag so often seen on period photographs. Not to worry, however, the solution is rather easy. You see, back in the 'good ol' days' we didn't have all of these wonderful Aftermarket accessories that are so readily available these days. So, using my pin vice I drilled small holes into the side of the hull between the return rollers and inserted a few short sections of brass to hold down the top run of the tracks. Viola! I had track sag. Once the tracks are painted and weathered the brass pins will be unnoticeable (hopefully) (photo 1).

My only fit issue with the kit came when trying to mate the upper and lower halves of the hull. Try as I might to get these parts to come together, it appears (at least in my case) that the top is a couple of millimetres too short in length. Through numerous test fits I was able to get a perfect match either at the front or the back, but not together at the same time. The solution was a very simple, however, only requiring my

adding a small strip of Evergreen to the front hull to bridge the gap (photo 2). The remainder of the build proceeded quickly and without incident. One highlight of this kit is the superb photoetched muffler covers. These pieces are some of the finest detailed, perforated



pieces I have encountered. Be advised, however, to be careful with the paintwork so as not to clog the small holes (photo 3). The turret contains some basic features including the gun breach and machine gun. The commander's cupola is detailed with clear plastic vision blocks and a nice representation of the multiple hatch configurations (photo 4).



The completed model prior to paint - completely out of the box.

Finemolds Type 97 'Chi-Ha' with Additional Armour

Complex Camouflage: Step-by-Step

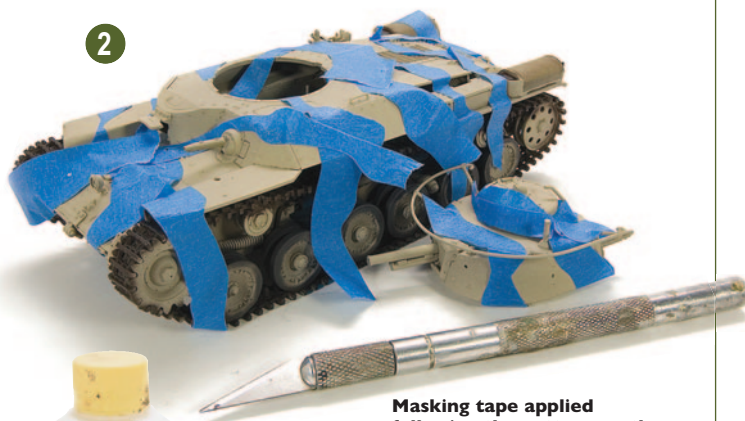
1

Base colour applied with Vallejo acrylics



2

Masking tape applied following the pattern on the kit instructions.



3

Green applied using the Tamiya paints followed by . . .



4

The Red Brown using the same procedure.



A Splash of Colour

Japanese armour can be a very colourful affair. Tanks were generally painted in hard-edged camouflage patches of Mahogany Brown and Dark or Olive Green over a dull brown base colour. One of the unique features of Japanese armour was the frequent use of a bright yellow disruptive stripe which made a cross pattern over the vehicle. This was going to be fun. I decided to apply my base colours using a mix of Vallejo paints: Stone Grey mixed with Beige, adding just a small drop of Chocolate Brown. The paints were thinned using tap water and then applied with

my airbrush. Once dry, I masked areas for the camouflage colours, the green colour first using a mix of Tamiya Sky (XF-21) and J.A.Green (XF-13), followed by the brown areas using Tamiya Red Brown (XF-64). The yellow disruptive stripe was also masked and painted using Vallejo Yellow mixed with Yellow Ochre.

I wanted to portray this vehicle as one that had been exposed to the harsh climate of the Pacific islands; the effects of sand, rocks, sun and salt air would certainly be evident. I began weathering by lightening my camouflage colour mixes slightly and then carefully sprayed these lighter tones to the center of green and brown

applications of MIG Productions Filter colours P242 and P401 which gave the vehicle a very nice faded, or washed-out appearance. The small surface details were brought forward by pin-washes using MIG Productions' Neutral Wash (photo 8).

In my opinion the model still looked stark and a bit toy-like at this stage; the finish lacked depth. The remedy, I have found, is the application of artist's oils. I concentrated first by adding richness to the base colours (camouflage included) by working in varying colours of greens,

6



areas to add a little 'fading' to the finish (photo 6). Some small chips and scratches were then applied using a soft sponge, taping along the areas

of highest wear (photo 7). Feeling that the overall appearance was still too bright I airbrushed a couple of light





yellows and browns from MIG Productions' range of Abteilung 502 artist's oils. This step takes a little time, both in the application and for the drying, but the results are worth the efforts. The results will be subtle tonal shifts and shading in the base colours, and any scratches you have applied will settle into the finish (rather than laying on top) **(photo 9)**.

Once the preceding step had thoroughly dried I continued with additional applications of oils. During this second round, however, I concentrated on laying the foundation for the final weathering and use of pigments. My colours now included Abteilung 502 colours of Buff, Light Mud, Dark Mud, Basic Earth, and Shadow Brown. These colours were worked into the areas of greatest dirt accumulation on the lower hull and running gear, around surface details, and into the nooks and corners of the vehicle. On the larger, horizontal surfaces, such as fenders and the rear engine deck, I like to thin the oil colours using turpentine and apply large puddles of these thick washes to the surface. Once dried, this method nicely recreates the appearance of light dusty/dirty areas. As with all weathering, but particularly the artist's oils, repeated applications are usually necessary

(photo 10).

Once I felt that I'd done all that I could with the artist's oils I moved onto using MIG Productions' pigments. These pigments are a very versatile tool and can be applied using a number of different methods. For me, I prefer to at least initially lay my pigment foundation using wet pigments, having first dissolved them in thinners. This method allows me to literally 'paint' the pigments exactly where I want them **(photo 11)**. Once dry, the pigments return to their original colours. Beginning with the areas where I laid 'dirty' foundation colours with the artist's oils I applied light coats of pigments over the top. I generally begin in the corners and slowly work my way outward to the center of the panels. The process was repeated numerous times with each application having a slightly different pigment colour and/or



consistency. Varying the mix is important to adding visual interest to the finished model. As a final step I applied MIG Productions' Pigment Fixer to permanently set the pigments in place. To apply the fixer I simply loaded a soft brush with the solution and lightly touch the surface of the model allowing the liquid to flow over the surfaces **(photo 12)**.



Finemolds Type 97 'Chi-Ha' with Additional Armour

Tackling the Paper Jungle: Step-by-Step

1



The Kamizukuri paper plants were simply sprayed with various greens.

2



A tangle of vegetation from the garden provided the jungle floor.

3



Tufts of grass from Silfor Products were added on top.

4



And the Kamizukuri jungle foliage attached with white glue.

Tackling the Paper Jungle

I'm not sure if this is true with other modellers, but for me when I begin a project I am also thinking of how I might be able to place the kit into a scene or setting. For some time I had been looking for an opportunity to try the laser cut paper foliage from Japanese firm, Kamizukuri, and now with the Chi-Ha I had the perfect excuse. The base itself could not have been simpler being made from a cut piece of foam with styrene sides topped with Magic Sculpt two-part putty. For the groundwork I looked no further than my own backyard and picked up a handful of material from under the trees and glued this over the top of the Magic Sculpt shell. This tangle of basic compost was perfect for simulating the dense tangle of brush near the ground.

I used three sets of the Kamizukuri products for this base: Banyan, Jungle-A, and Jungle-B. They could not be easier to use. To prepare them I simply airbrushed varying shades of

Vallejo greens and yellows onto the paper sheets and left them to dry. On some of the leaves I took a little time to add some variegation and veins for added interest. In the meantime I cut small section of brass wire and placed them into pre-drilled hole in the base, and then painted these 'stems' similar shades of green as I was using for the leaves. An additional layer of growth was added using Silfor Products tufts of

grass. Next, I carefully cut the paper foliage from the carrier and attached them to the stems using super glue. The small tree was made from a small twig from the backyard and then adorned with the Banyan leaves. As a final touch to the foliage I lightly brushed MIG Productions' Wet and Damp Earth Effects to the leaves to give them a nice sheen.

The Verdict

Availability and References



FineMolds 1/35 Type 97 'Chi-Ha' (ref. FM27) is distributed in the UK by ModelwholesaleUK (www.modelsforsale.com). Retail: £32.95

A. Tomczyk and W. Markowski, **Japanese Armor 1931-45 (Tank Power 8)**, available from the Aviation Book Centre at £25.99 (www.aviationbookcentre.com).



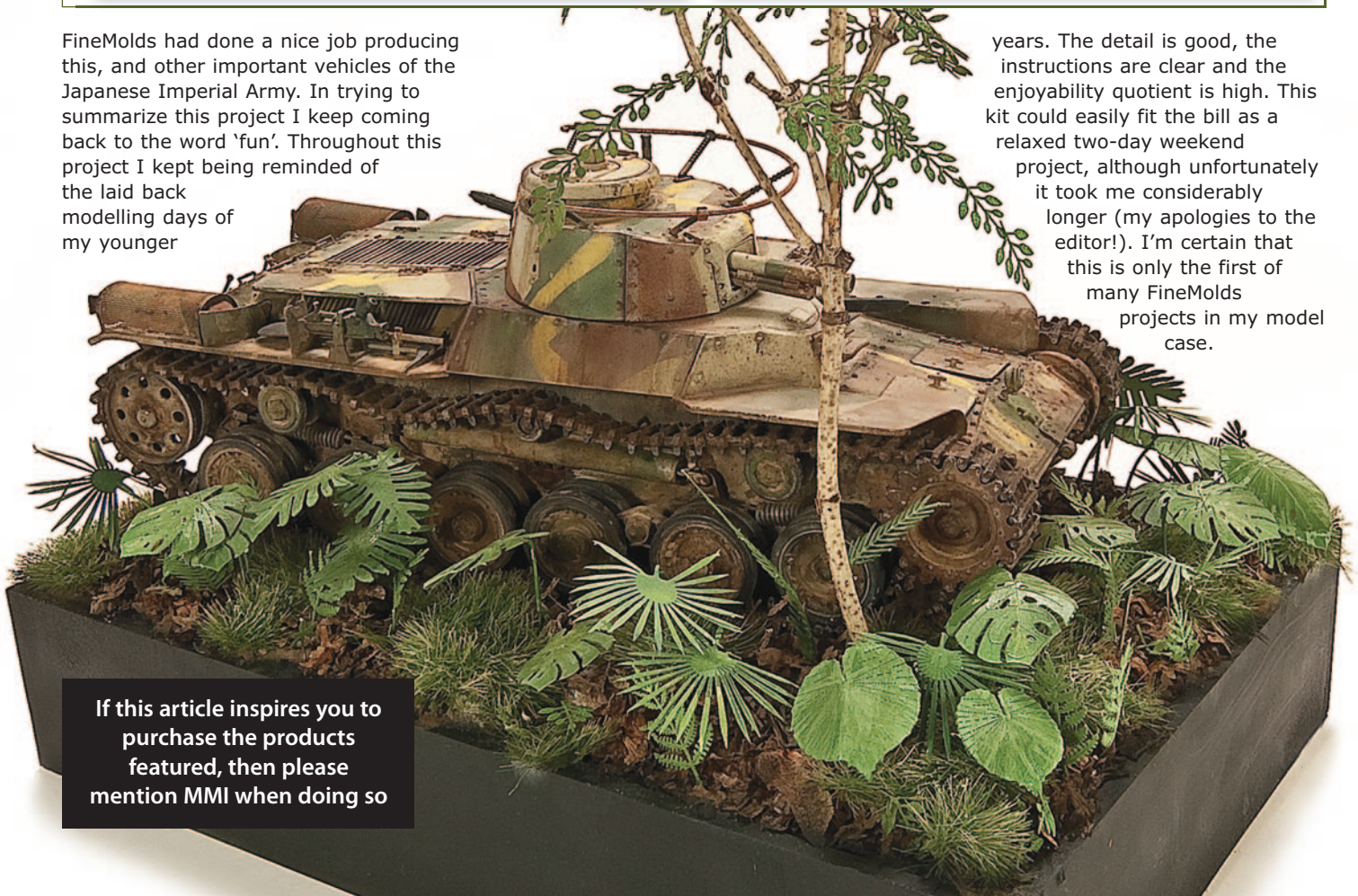
Kamizukuri Paper Plant Kits A-20, A-22-A, A-22-B, A-22-C. Kamizukuri are available from www.tasca-modellismo and other online retailers.

Rumble in the Jungle: In Detail



FineMolds had done a nice job producing this, and other important vehicles of the Japanese Imperial Army. In trying to summarize this project I keep coming back to the word 'fun'. Throughout this project I kept being reminded of the laid back modelling days of my younger

years. The detail is good, the instructions are clear and the enjoyability quotient is high. This kit could easily fit the bill as a relaxed two-day weekend project, although unfortunately it took me considerably longer (my apologies to the editor!). I'm certain that this is only the first of many FineMolds projects in my model case.



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