

***Leopard tanks like a Mercedes, says Ukrainian soldier training in Germany***  
***Sabine Siebold - Reuters***



*German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius visits a military base where Ukrainian soldiers undergo training on Leopard tanks destined for Ukraine© Thomson Reuters MUNSTER, Germany (Reuters) -*

*A Ukrainian soldier compared Germany's Leopard 2 tanks to a Mercedes as he underwent training with them ahead of their arrival on the battlefield, saying he hoped they would bring a breakthrough in the war.*

*He is among dozens of Ukrainian troops Germany is training on Leopard 2 simulators and then the tanks themselves at its largest military training ground, in Munster, before sending them to Ukraine.*

*Germany last month agreed to supply the tanks, regarded as one of the best in the West's arsenal, overcoming misgivings about sending heavy weaponry that Kyiv sees as crucial to defeat Russia's invasion but Moscow casts as a dangerous provocation.*

*"It is crucial that we use this modern weapon wisely, it will bring the breakthrough and we will win in the end," said the 57-year-old soldier.*

*Asked about the difference between Western and Soviet systems, he said: "You can imagine it like the difference between a Mercedes and a Zhiguli" - referring to a Soviet car sold under the brand name Lada in the West.*

*The version of the tanks Germany will be sending, produced by Krauss-Maffei Wegmann, weighs more than 60 tonnes, has a 120 mm smooth bore gun and can hit targets at a distance of up to 4 km (2.5 miles).*

*Ukraine's foreign minister said last month he expected to receive 120 to 140 Western tanks in a "first wave" of deliveries from a coalition of 12 countries, including the German Leopard 2, with time needed for training.*



*In all, Germany is training several hundred troops on various aspects of war-craft as part of a European effort to instruct some 15,000 Ukrainian soldiers.*

*Another soldier, who was being trained on the Marder infantry fighting vehicle, said the Western systems were not that far removed from those of Soviet-built vehicles the Ukrainians have been using.*

*"We have experience with similar weapons systems ... The logic is the same, sometimes we don't even need the interpreters to understand the instructors," said the 33-year-old, like his colleague wearing a scarf pulled up over his face and orange-tinted ballistic glasses to hide his identity.*

*German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius said he was impressed by the Ukrainian troops.*

*"Talking about a war is different from looking into the faces of people who ... came here directly from the frontline, and who will go back there with the tanks once they have completed their training," he told reporters.*

*The soldiers are working 12-hour days, six days a week.*

*"They are highly motivated and eager for knowledge ... They know that they will be back at the frontline in five weeks' time," said a German lieutenant-colonel who is responsible for the Leopard training and only gave his name as Peter.*

*Both soldiers are set to head back to Ukraine by the end of March.*

*Asked about how they tackle their fear, the 57-year-old said troops had to adapt to it. "Fear? Yes, everyone is afraid. But it is crucial how you handle your fear - and how to fight on despite of it," he said.*

*\*\*\* Reporting by Sabine Siebold; Editing by Alison Williams*