



The People's Liberation Army (PLA) Type 23 Military Ribbons

Turning Chicken Ribs into Chicken Drumsticks



An excerpt from the PLA as Organization v3.0 Conference publication
By Edward Francis, Jennifer Chang, and Ken Allen

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Introduction

In January 2023, the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) introduced measures overhauling its system of military ribbons (军人勋表), the multicolored rectangular badges (勋章) worn in rows above the left-side breast pocket of an officer's uniform. The measures, entitled Military Ribbon Management Regulations (《军队勋表管理规定》), implement the first changes to the PLA's ribbon system in over 15 years. When the system was last revised, in 2007, Xi Jinping had not yet acceded to the position of General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party but was beginning his ascent to power as a fresh appointee to the Politburo Standing Committee. Xi's subsequent tenure as Chinese Communist Party (CCP) General Secretary and Central Military Commission (CMC) Chairman has been characterized by sustained commitment to shaping the PLA officer corps into a politically loyal and operationally effective force, through myriad means including far-reaching organizational reforms, education and training initiatives, crack downs on corruption and disloyalty, and exhortations to avoid the perils of complacency and "peacetime malpractices" (和平积弊). The renovated ribbon system, though at first glance a comparatively superficial measure, should also be viewed as a deliberate step taken to instill professionalism, loyalty, and discipline within the PLA's officer corps and its enlisted force.

Since the new ribbons debuted last year, they have caught the attention of U.S. military and government officials who interact with counterparts in the PLA. The ribbons have also garnered interest from China analysts who

mine open-source imagery for insights into the PLA's leadership and activity patterns. The new ribbon system is of interest to both sets of observers in part because it offers more information than in the past, such as details about the wearer's service history and receipt of military medals and awards. Additionally, it breaks new ground by extending the use of ribbons beyond the PLA's officer corps, to now include all active-duty soldiers. Yet, a scarcity of English-language reporting on the ribbons has made it challenging to fully assess the impact of the new ribbons and to take full advantage of the information they impart. To address this gap, this report summarizes key features of the PLA's "Type 23" (23式) ribbon system, gleaned from open source resources including official PLA regulations and press releases, articles in PLA news outlets and other People's Republic of China (PRC) news media, and less formal Chinese Internet media such as microblog accounts and knowledge-sharing communities.

Sources of information

The full text of the Military Ribbon Management Regulations that now govern the design, production, conferral, and use of PLA military ribbons has not been made public. However, the PLA has issued details about the new ribbons through press releases and media interviews. Authoritative sources of official information regarding the new system include, first, an article that ran in the PLA's official newspaper, the People's Liberation Army Daily (PLA Daily, 解放军报), on 29 January 2023, which announced the new Regulations and commented on their overall intent. Second, a PRC Ministry of National Defense (MND, 国防部) press conference held in April 2023 included

statements on features of the new ribbon system. An official transcript of this press conference is available in both Chinese and English. The Chinese-language version of the transcript provides a much fuller visual guide to the ribbons and their manner of wear.

Images in this report show examples of Type 23 ribbons, and the report annexes provide details regarding the appearance and meaning of nearly 200 ribbons (with labels in English and Chinese). Depictions of Type 23 ribbons are widespread on the Chinese Internet, and include many informal guides to the new ribbon system that have been shared and republished repeatedly across microblog platforms and social media channels. Erring on the side of caution, research for this report focused on sources with some type of official link to the PLA when ascertaining the appearance and significance of Type 23 ribbon badges. These sources include explanatory interviews with PLA officers aired by PRC state media outlets such as CCTV-7, which show video footage of ribbons in neatly organized display boxes and graphical wall charts of labeled and categorized ribbons. Other sources include PLA Daily articles explaining China's military honors system, and visual guides to the new ribbons disseminated online by PLA organizations including the PLA Eastern Theater Command (东部战区) and PLA Strategic Support Force (中国人民解放军战略支援部队). After relying on this circumscribed set of PLA-sponsored sources to determine the appearance and meaning of each ribbon, additional research was performed using a wider assortment of official and unofficial media, to assemble a collection of high-quality reference images.¹

¹ The authors would also like to thank Kenneth W. Allen and Dennis J. Blasko for providing valuable English-language reference resources for this report, including an unpublished guide to understanding PLA military uniforms (Allen and Blasko, 2021) and briefing slides about the new ribbons (Blasko, 2023).



Figure 1: GAO Guanwen (高官文), a senior colonel serving as a staff officer at the Forces Management Bureau under the CMC Training Management Department, wears Type 23 ribbons during an April 2023 interview aired by CCTV-7. In this image, Senior Colonel Gao stands next to a CCTV reporter behind a display case containing a compilation of the new ribbons. Behind Gao, a digital rendering shows the ribbons organized into labeled categories.

Understanding the New Ribbon System

Purpose

The Type 23 ribbon system features nearly 200 ribbons in total, of which nearly 80 percent (160 out of 198) denote military honors or service experience. By comparison, the former Type 07 system had only 22 ribbons, all of which were used to show either position level or time in service.² These numbers alone imply a shift in the primary function of PLA ribbon racks following the update, from simply indicating the wearer's position level and seniority, to showcasing military honors and service experience. This interpretation is supported by official PLA statements regarding the ribbons. The PLA Daily article that announced the new ribbon system in January 2023 connects the update to the PLA's ongoing efforts, championed by Xi Jinping, to establish a system of military

honors and awards that will motivate soldiers to prepare for combat and to fight and win wars. The article explains that the newly-enriched ribbons system prominently features honors and service experience, "to further enhance the attractiveness of the military profession and soldiers' sense of mission and honor, and to create a positive situation of cherishing honor, respecting heroes, and striving to be in the vanguard." While the new system retains elements to communicate position level and time in service, the new ribbons place particular emphasis on wartime honors and combat experience by "giving prominence to wartime, highlighting military exploits, focusing on encouraging participation in combat, and emphasizing special experiences and honors such as combat, execution of important missions, and service in difficult areas, in terms of ribbon badge design, order of wearing, and quantity worn."

There is evidence that the PLA has

debated reforming its ribbon system to more fully reflect honors and service experience for some time. For example, a 2015 article in National Defense Reference (国防参考), a defense and national security magazine sponsored by PLA Daily, critiques limitations of China's Type 07 military ribbons system, in comparison to those of foreign countries including the United States. The article points out that foreign military honors tend to have four main parts: grade ribbons, time-in-service ribbons, merit ribbons, and service ribbons. By contrast, the PLA's former "seniority ribbons" only covered two of the four internationally accepted ribbon types (grade and years of service), failing to reflect the meritorious deeds and service status of soldiers. As a result, the Type 07 ribbons could prompt misconceptions that the PLA mainly focuses on seniority and overlooks knowledge, ability, and contributions. The 2015 article presciently calls for years-of-service ribbons, which formerly

² Type 07 ribbons included 15 grade (position level) ribbons, six time in service ribbons, and one placeholder (or decorative) blank ribbon.

occupied a large proportion of the ribbon rack, to be reduced to one-third, leaving the remaining two-thirds of the layout for honor and service ribbons.

Main Changes

The most obvious modification to the PLA's ribbon system introduced by the 2023 update is the addition of two new categories of ribbons, to show military honors (功勋荣誉表彰) and service experience (服役经历), respectively. The former Type 07 (07式) ribbon racks, referred to informally as "seniority ribbons" or "seniority badges" (级别资历章), held only ribbons that communicated the wearer's position level (grade) and years served.³ A decorative white placeholder ribbon was also available to use as needed to complete an orderly layout of three ribbons per row. The Type 07 ribbons notably did not identify any military awards or honors. Under the current system, there are now four types of ribbons that may be worn, including the aforementioned military honors and service experience ribbons, position level (岗位职务层级) ribbons, and years of service (服役年限) ribbons.

In a second significant change, the 2023 system expands the use of ribbons to a much wider assortment of PLA personnel. While enlisted soldiers did not wear any ribbons under the Type 07 system, following the update ribbons are now worn by active-duty officers (现役军官), NCOs (军士), conscripts (义务兵), and students at military educational institutions (军队院校共给制学员). Military ribbons are not worn by civilian personnel employed by the PLA (文职人员), reservists (预备役人员), or retired veterans (退役人员). The Type 23 system adds position level ribbons with a muted green (wintergreen) background for non-commissioned officers (NCOs) in management roles. The extension of ribbons to the PLA's enlisted force can be understood as a corollary to the ribbon system's fresh focus on displaying and taking pride in

military honors. The January 2023 PLA Daily article introducing the new ribbon system states that it "treats officers and soldiers together as a single force" and "fully demonstrates that officers and soldiers are equal in the face of honor." In an effort to promote unity between them, all officers and enlisted soldiers, regardless of rank differences, can display honors and be recognized for their contributions.

A third change, which may surprise observers familiar with the Type 07 seniority ribbons, is that the number of rows on the Type 23 ribbon rack is no longer an indication of time in service or grade level, but is instead based on military awards and service experience. Under the previous system, it was customary for senior officers and civilian cadres (文职干部) to use multiple (sometimes many) years-of-service ribbons and decorative placeholder ribbons to fill out a specific number of rows corresponding to their grade level. A vice chairman or member of the CMC, for example, would always have a ribbon rack with seven rows, while a battalion-level command officer would have only two rows of ribbons. Under the new system, officers use only a single colored ribbon and one star (deputy grade) or two stars (full grade) to indicate their current grade level, and one or two ribbons to communicate their total time in service. While ribbon racks may still hold up to seven rows of ribbons, most of this space is now available to display the wearer's military honors (such as ribbons reflecting the receipt of medals, awards, and commendations), service experience, participation in important activities, and even training experience. Therefore, a lower-ranked officer with richer military experience and awards could potentially have more rows than a higher-ranked officer with fewer military accolades.

Ribbon Types

According to news coverage of the Type 23 ribbons by PRC military

news channel CCTV-7 and reference materials shared by the PLA Eastern Theater Command and PLA Strategic Support Force, the new system's 200-odd ribbons can be divided by category into 97 military honors ribbons, 63 service experience ribbons, 24 position level ribbons, and 14 ribbons to show years of service. The following sections briefly introduce each of the four types of ribbon now in use.

Military Honors

The 2023 ribbon update effectively shifts the PLA ribbon system's main emphasis from communicating grade level and time in service for officers, to displaying military honors and service experience for all active-duty personnel. The Type 23 system includes new ribbons representing more than seventy military-wide wartime and peacetime military honors. There are also 21 ribbons for service (Army, Navy, Air Force, and Rocket Force), branch (Strategic Support Force, Joint Logistic Support Force), and People's Armed Police awards programs.

The ribbons reflect recent regulations on military honors issued by the CCP Central Committee, the State Council, and the CMC in February 2022, titled Regulations on the Armed Forces' Honors System (《军队功勋荣誉表彰条例》). According to explanatory remarks by leaders of the CMC's Political Work Department (中央军委政治工作部) in connection with the 2022 regulations, the PLA's military honors system focuses on strengthening both "spiritual and material incentives" (精神激励和物质激励) to promote a culture of achievement, honor, and recognition of meritorious deeds, to foster a strong combat force that can fight and win wars.

The 2022 Regulations on the Armed Forces' Honors System define three major categories of military honors: wartime honors, peacetime honors,

³ Of note, unlike the U.S. military, time-in-service includes time served as an officer cadet.



Figure 2: PLA military honors ribbons (left) and service experience ribbons (rightmost column), are shown in a display case in CCTV-7 programming aired April 2023. Red Banner and Red Star ribbons can be seen at upper left.

and honors for efforts during major military operations other than war. The regulations also outline an overall honors system framework encompassing honorary medals (勋章), honorary titles (荣誉称号), merit awards and citations (奖励), commendations (表彰), and commemorative medals (纪念章). The spectrum of military honors described by the 2022 regulations is reflected in the military honors ribbons under the Type 23 system. For example, the Red Banner (红旗勋章) and Red Star (红星勋章) medals, two prestigious wartime awards from the early days of the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army (中国工农红军) that were revived in 2022, are both represented by new ribbons. Detailed images and English labels for military honors ribbons are provided in Annex A.

Visually, the new ribbon system highlights the “red gene elements” (红色基因元素) of the Chinese military by using three dominant colors – red, yellow, and green – to symbolize revolution, victory, and peace, respectively. It features highly

recognizable accessory elements with distinctive meanings such as red flags, five-star arrangements, the Great Wall, and rifles.

Service Experience

The updated ribbon system also includes ribbons to show the wearing officer or soldier's service experience. Like military honors, service experience is a new category of information imparted under the Type 23 system. The category includes more than sixty ribbons to highlight different types and levels of experience.

Many service experience ribbons relate to service in a particular job role or assignment within the PLA, such as ribbons showing unit command experience, work experience in a PLA administrative or functional organ, work experience in a joint position, work experience in a specialized technical position, work experience in a specific service (or the People's Armed Police), and experience as an instructor at a military educational institution. Other ribbons commemorate involvement in military activities or missions of an exceptional or significant nature, irrespective of position level or title, such as ribbons for combat experience, involvement in major special missions or major military operations other than war, overseas service experience, and border defense service experience.

There are also several ribbons for educational experience, such as command education and training experience, specialized technical officer training experience, NCO promotion-related training experience, and international (overseas) education or training experience. A table of service experience ribbons with English labels is provided in Annex B⁴.

Officer Grade and NCO Billet Ribbons

The 2023 ribbon system maintains continuity with the PLA's former seniority ribbon system, in that it includes ribbons to show the wearer's



Figure 3: This image, published in April 2023 Sohu.com and QQ.com articles attributed to the PLA's Eastern Theater Command, shows labeled examples of military honor ribbons, including Red Banner and Red Star awards. The ribbons at right represent wartime honors (special class, first class, and second class, from top to bottom), including individual and collective award variants.

⁴ In April 2024, the PLA Ministry of National Defense announced fresh reforms to the PLA's organizational structure, including the elimination of the Strategic Support Force and the establishment of a new multi-branch (or “arm”) layout consisting of an Aerospace Force, Cyberspace Force, Information Support Force, and Joint Logistic Support Force (preexisting). As of June 2024, ribbons reflecting service experience or awards associated with the three new branches have not yet been observed.



Figure 4: This image, published in April 2023 Sohu.com and QQ.com articles attributed to the PLA's Eastern Theater Command, shows labeled examples of military service experience ribbons, including command experience ribbons (at left, with crossed swords) and organizational work experience ribbons (at right, with stars to indicate leadership).



Figure 5: This example ribbon rack, shown in a CCTV-7 report aired in April 2023, includes examples of two service experience ribbons worn by a squad leader NCO. The ribbon in the second row at far right is a commemorative ribbon for overseas service experience (third class). The first ribbon in the third row at far left signifies completion of junior-level NCO promotion-related training.

position level in the PLA. Grade (军队级别) is a hierarchical designator used by the PLA in parallel with rank to indicate the formal level of an officer's job title. While the Type 07 system had 15 grade ribbons, the 2023 ribbon system has 19 grade ribbons for officers, including 15 ribbons for officers in command or administrative (also referred to as non-technical) positions (指挥管理官岗位) and four ribbons for specialized technical officers (专业技术军官岗位). There are now also five new ribbons for non-commissioned officers in management positions (士兵管理职务).⁵

Although there are similarities in the appearance of Type 23 grade ribbons compared to the Type 07 grade ribbons, there are also differences. For example, CMC vice chairmen and members are now distinguished by slightly different ribbon patterns. While sharing the same one star emblem surrounded by a circular olive branch for members, vice chairmen ribbons now contain an additional olive branch spread

provides a detailed table of officer grade ribbons and NCO billet assignment ribbons.⁶

Years-of-Service Ribbons

The Type 23 ribbon system also continues to use years-of-service ribbons to convey the wearing officer or



Figure 6: The images above show the appearance and meaning of grade/billet ribbons for command officers, specialized technical officers, and NCOs, respectively. These images were shared in May 2023 in an article posted to PRC social news site 163.com by an official account operated by the PLA Strategic Support Force.

horizontally across the bottom of the ribbon. Under the Type 07 system, the vice chairmen and members wore the same ribbon containing a single star emblem surrounded by a circular olive branch. New ribbons for specialized technical officers are worn based on position level, not academic or technical qualifications, and include ribbons for junior level (light blue), intermediate level (purple), deputy senior level (red), and senior level (gold) technical positions.

New ribbons for NCOs include ribbons for enlisted personnel serving in squad leader (full and deputy), *fendui* leader (full and deputy), and staff NCO positions. Within the context of the PLA, the term "*fendui*" (分队) can be translated variously as subunit, detachment, or element, and can refer to either a grassroots-level unit or ad hoc grouping of personnel. Annex C

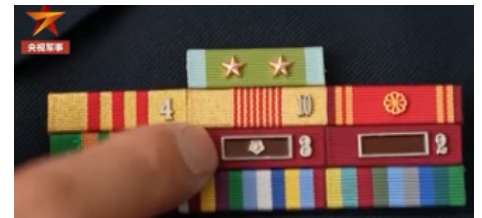


Figure 7: This example ribbon rack, included in a Xinhua Daily Media Group article based on CCTV-7 reporting, shows an NCO fendui leader position level ribbon in the top row (with two stars).



Figure 8: This example ribbon rack, included in a Xinhua Daily Media Group article based on CCTV-7 reporting, shows a special technical officer intermediate-level grade ribbon in the middle of the top row (with purple background and single six-pointed atom pin).

⁵ Kenneth W. Allen and John F. Corbett, Jr., "Predicting PLA Leader Promotions" in Civil-Military Change in China: Elites, Institutes, and Ideas After the 16th Party Congress, Andrew Scobell and Larry Wortzel, eds. (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2004).

⁶ Kevin Pollpeter and Kenneth W. Allen, eds., The PLA as Organization v2.0, (Defense Group Inc., 2012).

soldier's total time in service. The 2023 system adds ribbons for service periods of six, seven, eight, and nine years, which were formerly represented using combinations of ribbons of smaller values between one and five, and for 20, 30, 40, and 50 year service periods. PRC media commentators have noted that determining an officer's time in service under the new system is simpler and requires less math than it did under the old system, which necessitated

the use of several ribbons to represent longer service terms. A table of years-of-service ribbons, with English labels, is provided in Annex D.

Ribbon Rules

How to Arrange

Explanatory materials issued by the PRC MND in April 2023 offer guidance regarding the manner in which ribbons are to be worn under the new system. According to these guidelines, the four types of ribbon are typically arranged from top to bottom and from left to right in the order of position level, military honors, service experience, and service years. Ribbons are organized into rows on an officer's ribbon rack, with each row holding up to three ribbons, and no more than seven rows in total.

There are also position and order conventions within each ribbon category. Position level ribbons are by convention placed in the center of the first row of ribbons, which can now hold either one, two or three ribbons. Rules for honors ribbons include placing personal honors first, followed by collective honors (unit awards); wartime honors first, followed by peacetime honors; and military-wide awards first, followed by service branch or People's Armed Police

ribbons. Section 8 of the Military Ribbon Management Regulations (《规定》第八条), the text of which has not been disclosed, reportedly provides a specific order in which service experience ribbons should appear. When more than one years-of-service ribbon is used (for example, when using both a 10-year ribbon and a one-year ribbon to indicate 11 years of service), the larger-value ribbon should be on the left, followed by the smaller value.

A "digital accessory" (数字配件) may be used in some cases, to show that the wearer has received multiple awards of the same type. Pictures show that the term "digital accessory" refers to a small Arabic numeral pin that is attached to the face of the ribbon. For example, the regulations state that ribbons for merit awards of different levels can be worn together simultaneously, and merit awards of the same level but different "situational context" (不同情形) can also be worn together. But, in instances where an individual has received the same level of merit award for the same situational context multiple times, only one ribbon should be worn, and a digital accessory should be attached to reflect the total number of awards.

When and How to Wear

According to guidance provided by the PRC MND, PLA soldiers should wear ribbons when wearing dress uniforms (for officers) (礼服), spring-autumn, summer, and winter (for NCOs and conscripts) service uniforms (常服); and work uniforms (作业服). Ribbons should not be worn when wearing other military uniforms (其他军服), such as training (combat) and athletic uniforms, or casual clothes.

In general, when wearing ribbons, PLA personnel are also permitted to wear corresponding honorary medals (勋章), award medals (奖章), and commemorative medals (纪念章) at the same time. However, official guidance dictates that when wearing ribbons, non-commissioned officers, conscripts, and cadets should not wear national defense service medals (国防服役章).

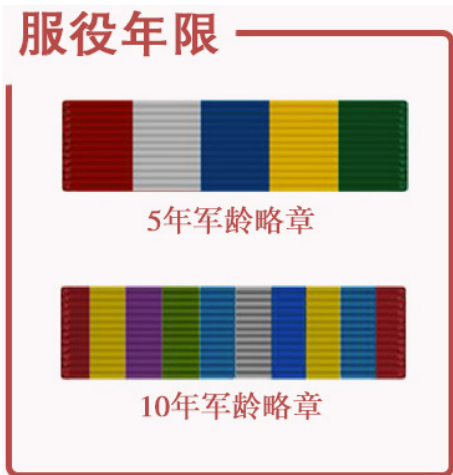


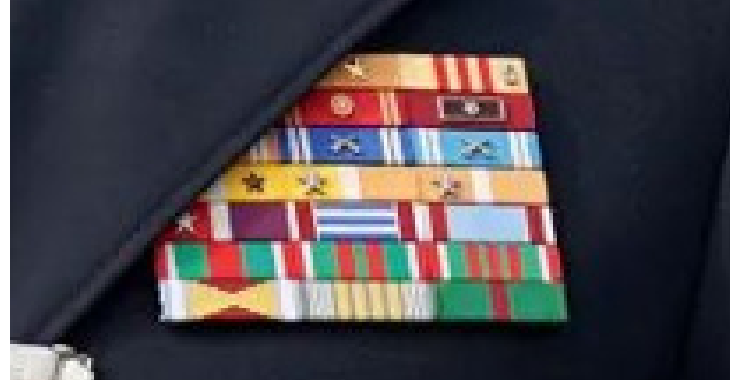
Figure 9: A visual guide to the Type 23 ribbons issued by the PRC Ministry of Defense in April 2023 provides two examples of time-in-service ribbons. The top ribbon represents five years of service. The bottom ribbon represents ten years.




Figure 10: PLA Type 23 time in service ribbons. This image was shared in a May 2023 article posted to PRC social news site 163.com under an official account operated by the PLA Strategic Support Force.

Examples

This section provides several examples of the new Type 23 ribbons, as worn by PLA personnel since their introduction in January 2023.



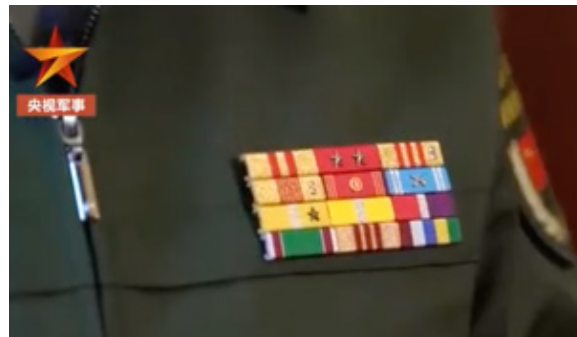
(Obscured)	 Command/admin. officer, corps grade (军级正职)	 Peacetime merit award, third class (平时立功奖章), multiple
(Obscured)	 Commendation (表彰荣誉), second class (个人二级)	 Commemorative medal, major military operations other than war (重大非战争军事行动纪念章)
 Unit command experience (单位主官任职经历), corps grade (正军级)	 Unit command experience (单位主官任职经历), battalion grade (正营级)	 Unit command experience, company grade (正连级)
 Org. work exp. (机关任职经历), theater command grade (leadership of internal division-level org.) (正战区 (机关处级内设机构主要领导人))	 Organizational work experience, deputy theater command grade (leadership) (副战区 (主要领导人))	 Organizational work experience, corps grade (leadership) (军级 (主要领导人))
 Org. work exp., division, brigade, or regiment grade (leadership) (师旅团级 (主要领导人))	 Service experience, PLA Navy (海军)	 Service experience, PLA Air Force (空军)
 Senior-level command education and training (高级指挥教育培训经历)	 Intermediate command education and training (中级)	 Junior-level command education and training (初级)
 Overseas education/training (出国 (境) 教育培训经历)	 Forty years in service (四十年)	 One year in service (一年)

The first two photographs show ribbons worn by PLA Navy Rear Admiral (少将) ZHANG Gong (张弓), then serving as commander of the Jiangxi Military District (江西省军区司令员), while posing in front of the Great Hall of the People (人民大会堂) as a deputy to China's 14th National People's Congress (第十四届全国人大代表) in March 2023.

The table that follows these photographs provides an explanation of the ribbons worn by Rear Admiral Zhang. The ribbons communicate that Zhang is currently a command or administrative officer in a corps grade position, with 41 years of experience. He has received military honors including multiple peacetime merit awards (third class), a second-class commendation, and a commemorative award for experience in a major military operation other than war. Zhang has command experience leading units at the corps, battalion, and company grade levels. He has administrative or functional organ work experience including leadership of an internal division-level organization within a theater command grade organization, leadership of a deputy theater command grade organization, leadership of a corps grade organization, and leadership of a division, brigade, or regiment grade organization. Zhang has service experience in both the PLA Navy and PLA Air Force. His ribbon rack has badges indicating several types and levels of education and training experience, including senior, intermediate, and junior-level command education and training, and overseas education and training experience.

Examples (cont.)

This section provides several examples of the new Type 23 ribbons, as worn by PLA personnel since their introduction in January 2023.

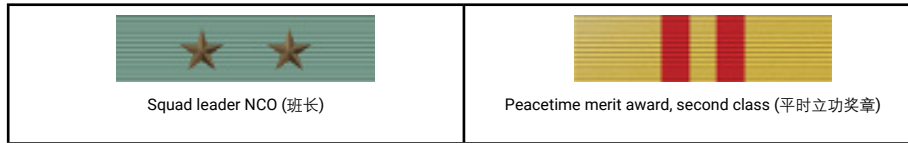


 Peacetime merit award, (平时立功奖章), second class	 Command/admin. officer, division grade (师级正职)	 Peacetime merit award, third class, multiple (个人三等 (不区分情形))
 Peacetime citation (平时嘉奖) (multiple)	 Commendation (表彰荣誉), third class	 Unit command experience, company grade (正连级)
 Org. work experience, CMC (leadership of internal division-level organization) (军委 (机关处级内设机构主要领导))	 Organizational work experience, theater command grade (正战区)	 Org. work experience, division, brigade, or regiment grade (师旅团级)
 Service experience, PLA Army (陆军)	 Thirty years of service (三十年)	 Five years of service (五年)

The next set of pictures shows ribbons worn by GAO Guanwen (高官文), a senior colonel (大校) serving as a staff officer at the Forces Management Bureau (部队管理局) under the CMC's Training Management Department (军委训练管理部), during an April 2023 interview with CCTV-7 in which he explains the new military ribbon system. Senior Colonel Gao's ribbons include a red grade ribbon with two stars to reflect his current service in a division grade command or administrative position. He has received several peacetime merit awards, include one second-class award and multiple third-class awards (as shown by a digital accessory). Gao has also received peacetime citations (multiple), and a third-class commendation. Gao's ribbons also include service experience ribbons showing command of a company grade unit, leadership of an internal division-level organization within the CMC, work experience in a theater command grade functional or administrative organ, and work experience in a division, brigade, or regiment grade functional or administrative organ. The left-most badge in the bottom row of Gao's ribbon rack appears to be a service experience ribbon for PLA Army (Ground Force) service – the Army service ribbon is very similar in appearance to the Joint Logistic Support Force service ribbon. The final two ribbons worn by Gao are 30-year and five-year time in service ribbons that together indicate 35 years of service.

Examples (cont.)

This section provides several examples of the new Type 23 ribbons, as worn by PLA personnel since their introduction in January 2023.



The third set of images shows ribbons worn by PLA Army Sergeant Second Class (二级上士) CHEN Yu (陈瑜), also photographed while serving as a deputy to the National People's Congress in March 2023. Sergeant Chen's ribbon rack has two ribbons in its top row, including an NCO squad leader ribbon and a peacetime merit award (second class). The second row of her ribbon rack includes ribbons for peacetime citations (multiple, as indicated by the attachment of a digital accessory), and outstanding grassroots soldier honors (also multiple). The final ribbon in the second row is a service years ribbon reflecting ten years of service.

Conclusions

The Type 23 military ribbon system introduced by the PLA's January 2023 Military Ribbon Management Regulations significantly revamps the system of military ribbon insignia worn by officers, and now also enlisted soldiers, in the PLA. One Chinese commentator drolly describes the transition from Type 07 ribbons to Type 23 ribbons as "turning chicken ribs into chicken drumsticks" ("鸡肋"变"鸡腿"), and it is clear that the new system has more substance, compared to the former seniority ribbons that were sometimes derided as mere

























collections of salary slips. The new ribbon scheme features not only twice as many ribbon types, but also a greatly expanded array of individual ribbon badges to express the new categories of information. The Type 23 system, with its new focus on decorations for military honors and service experience, brings the Chinese military's use of ribbons into closer alignment with the practices of foreign militaries such as the United States armed forces.

This report and the included reference tables in its annexes provide a baseline for interpreting the PLA's ribbon system

in the near term. However, it is anticipated that the assortment of PLA military ribbons in circulation will continue to evolve, to reflect external factors such as ongoing organizational reforms and diversification within the PLA's broader system of military honors, merit awards, and commemorative medals. Because the new military honors and service experience ribbon categories are likely to be more dynamic than the grade and time in service ribbons under the old system (essentially unchanged for 15 years), it will now be more important to review and update resources for interpreting the PLA's ribbon system periodically.

Annex A – Military Honors Ribbons







































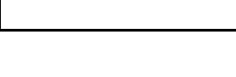

Note: Labels (in Chinese) and English translations for the ribbons shown in Annexes A through D were determined by reference to source material disseminated on social news websites by PLA organizations including the PLA Eastern Theater Command and PLA Strategic Support Force. The scalable vector graphics (SVG) illustrations of each ribbon were collected from a Chinese-language Wikipedia entry for “PRC Military Ribbons” (中华人民共和国军人勋表) updated in March and April 2023 with images of Type 23 ribbons.

Type	Level	Appearance	Type	Level	Appearance
Wartime honors (战时荣誉)	Red Banner medal (红旗勋章)		Wartime merit awards (战时立功奖章 / 集体立功荣誉)	First class (command operations) (个人一等 (指挥作战))	
	Red Star medal (红星勋章)			First class (combat participation) (个人一等 (参加战斗))	
Wartime honorary titles and model unit honors (战时荣誉称号奖章 / 英模单位荣誉)	Special class (特级)			First class (support) (个人一等 (支援保障))	
	First class (一级)			First class (context unspecified) (个人一等 (不区分情形略章))	
	Second class (二级)			Second class (command operations) (个人二等 (指挥作战))	
	Model unit – special class (特级英模单位)			Second class (combat partic.) (个人二等 (参加战斗))	
	Model unit – first class (一级英模单位)			Second class (support) (个人二等 (支援保障))	
	Model unit – second class (二级英模单位)			Second class (context unspecified) (个人二等 (不区分情形略章))	
Peacetime honorary titles and collective honors (平时荣誉称号奖章 / 集体荣誉称号)	First class (个人一级)			Third class (command operations) (个人三等 (指挥作战))	
	Second class (个人二级)			Third class (combat participation) (个人三等 (参加战斗))	
	Collective (集体)			Third class (support) (个人三等 (支援保障))	
Honorary titles for major MOOTW (重大非战争军事行动荣誉称号奖章 / 集体荣誉称号)	Individual (个人)				
	Collective (集体)				

Annex A – Military Honors Ribbons (cont.)

Type	Level	Appearance	Type	Level	Appearance
Wartime merit awards (战时立功奖章 / 集体立功荣誉) (cont.)	Third class (context unspecified) (个人三等 (不区分情形略章))		Peacetime merit awards (平时立功奖章 / 集体立功荣誉) (cont.)	First class (context unspec.) (个人一等 (不区分情形))	
	Fourth class (command operations) (个人四等 (指挥作战))			Second class (combat training) (个人二等 (战备训练))	
	Fourth class (combat partic.) (个人四等 (参加战斗))			Second class (edu. and mgmt.) (个人二等 (教育管理))	
	Fourth class (support) (个人四等 (支援保障))			Second class (defense S&T) (个人二等 (国防科技))	
	Fourth class (context unspecified) (个人四等 (不区分情形略章))			Second class (service support) (个人二等 (服务保障))	
	Collective first class (集体一等)			Second class (context unspec.) (个人二等 (不区分情形))	
	Collective second class (集体二等)			Third class (combat training) (个人三等 (战备训练))	
	Collective third class (集体三等)			Third class (edu. & mgmt.) (个人三等 (教育管理))	
	Collective fourth class (集体四等)			Third class (defense S&T) (个人三等 (国防科技))	
Peacetime merit awards (平时立功奖章 / 集体立功荣誉)	First class (combat training) (个人一等 (战备训练))		Third class (service support) (个人三等 (服务保障))		
	First class (edu. & mgmt.) (个人一等 (教育管理))		Third class (context unspec.) (个人三等 (不区分情形))		
	First class (defense S&T) (个人一等 (国防科技))				
	First class (service support) (个人一等 (服务保障))				

Annex A – Military Honors Ribbons (cont).

Type	Level	Appearance	Type	Level	Appearance	
Peacetime merit awards (平时立功奖章 / 集体立功荣誉) (cont.)	Collective first class (集体一等)		Commendations (表彰荣誉)	First class (个人一级)		
	Collective second class (集体二等)			Second class (个人二级)		
	Collective third class (集体三等)			Third class (个人三级)		
Major MOOTW merit awards (重大非战争军事行动立功奖章 / 集体立功荣誉)	First class (个人一等)			Outstanding grassroots officer or soldier (优秀基层官兵荣誉)	Collective first class (集体一级)	
	Second class (个人二等)				Collective second class (集体二级)	
	Third class (个人三等)				Collective third class (集体三级)	
	Collective first class (集体一等)			First class (个人一级)		
	Collective second class (集体二等)			Second class (个人二级)		
	Collective third class (集体三等)			Third class (个人三级)		
Peacetime citations (平时嘉奖 / 集体嘉奖荣誉)	Combat training (个人 (战备训练))		Medal of valor (英勇纪念章)			
	Edu & mgmt. (个人 (教育管理))		Dedication to national defense commemorative medal (献身国防纪念章)			
	Defense S&T (个人 (国防科技))		Ground Force (Army) Vanguard Honors (陆军先锋荣誉)	First class (一级)		
	Service support (个人 (服务保障))			Second class (二级)		
	Context unspec. (个人 (不区分情形))			Third class (三级)		
	Collective (集体)		Navy Deep Blue Warrior Honors (海军深蓝勇士荣誉)	First class (一级)		
				Second class (二级)		
		Third class (三级)				
Major MOOTW citations (重大非战争军事行动嘉奖 / 集体嘉奖荣誉)	Individual (个人)		Air Force Air and Space Iron Fist Honors (空军空天铁拳荣誉)	First class (一级)		
	Collective (集体)			Second class (二级)		
				Third class (三级)		
























Annex A – Military Honors Ribbons (cont).

Type	Level	Appearance	Type	Level	Appearance
Rocket Force Sword Sharpening Vanguard Honors (火箭军砺剑尖兵荣誉)	First class (一级)		Joint Logistics Support Vanguard Honors (联勤保障尖兵荣誉)	First class (一级)	
	Second class (二级)			Second class (二级)	
	Third class (三级)			Third class (三级)	
Strategic Support Vanguard Honors (战略支援尖兵荣誉)	First class (一级)		People's Armed Police Loyal Guard Honors (武警忠诚卫士荣誉)	First class (一级)	
	Second class (二级)			Second class (二级)	
	Third class (三级)			Third class (三级)	

















Annex B – Service Experience Ribbons

Type	Level	Appearance	Type	Level	Appearance
Combat experience (front) (作战纪念章) (正面)			Unit command experience (单位主官任职经历) (cont.)	Deputy corps (副军级)	
Combat experience (rev.) (作战纪念章) (背面)				Division (正师级)	
Experience in major military operations other than war (MOOTW) (重大非战争军事行动纪念章)				Deputy division (副师级)	
Major special mission experience (重大专项任务经历)				Regiment (正团级)	
Overseas service experience (海外服役纪念章)	First class (一级)		Admin. or functional organ. work exp. (机关任职经历)	Deputy regiment (副团级)	
	Second class (二级)			Battalion (正营级)	
	Third class (三级)			Deputy battalion (副营级)	
Border defense service experience (卫国戍边纪念章)	First class (一级)			Company (正连级)	
	Second class (二级)			CMC (军委)	
	Third class (三级)			CMC (leadership) (军委 (主要领导))	
Unit command experience (单位主官任职经历)	Theater command (正战区)		CMC (leadership of internal bureau-level organization) (军委 (机关局级内设机构主要领导))	CMC (leadership of internal bureau-level organization) (军委 (机关局级内设机构主要领导))	
	Deputy T.C. (副战区)				
	Corps (正军级)				





















Annex B – Service Experience Ribbons (cont.)

Type	Level	Appearance	Type	Level	Appearance
Admin. or functional organ. work exp. (机关任职经历) (cont.)	CMC (leadership of internal division-level organization) (军委 (机关处级内设机构主要领导))		Admin. or functional organ. work exp. (机关任职经历) (cont.)	Corps (leadership of internal division-level organization) (军级 (机关处级内设机构主要领导))	
	Theater command (正战区))			Division, brigade, or regiment (师旅团级)	
	Theater command (leadership) (正战区(主要领导))			Division, brigade, or regiment (leadership) (师旅团级 (主要领导))	
	Theater command (leadership of internal bureau-level organization) (正战区 (机关局级内设机构主要领导))			Joint post experience (联合岗位任职经历)	Senior (高级)
	Theater command (leadership of internal division-level organization) (正战区 (机关处级内设机构主要领导))		Service / branch / People's Armed Police Force experience (军兵种和武警部队任职经历)	Intermediate (中级)	
	Deputy theater command (副战区))			Junior (初级)	
	Deputy theater command (leadership) (副战区 (主要领导))			Ground Force (Army) (陆军)	
	Deputy theater command (leadership of internal division-level organization) (副战区 (机关处级内设机构主要领导))			Navy (海军)	
	Corps (军级)			Air Force (空军)	
	Corps (leadership) (军级 (主要领导))			Rocket Force (火箭军)	
				Strategic Support Force (战略支援部队)	
			Joint Logistic Support Force (联勤保障部队)		
			People's Armed Police (武警部队)		
			National defense mobilization unit work experience (国防动员单位任职经历)		

Annex B – Service Experience Ribbons (cont.)

Type	Level	Appearance	Type	Level	Appearance
Military edu. institution edu. officer (instructor) experience (军队院校教官 (教员) 任职经历)	Full-time (专职教官 (教员))		Command edu. and training experience (指挥教育培训经历) (cont.)	Intermediate (中级)	
	Part-time (兼职教官 (教员))			Junior (初级)	
Special. technical position service experience (专业技术岗位任职经历)	Senior (正高职)		Special technical officer training experience (专业技术军官培训经历)	Senior (高级)	
	Deputy senior (副高职)			Intermediate (中级)	
	Intermediate (中 职)			Junior (初级)	
	Junior (初职)		NCO promotion-related training experience (军士晋升培训经历)	Senior (高级)	
Command edu. and training experience (指挥教育培训经历)	Senior (高级)	Intermediate (中 级)			
Command edu. and training experience (指挥教育培训经历)	Senior (高级)		Junior (初级)		
			International education and training experience (出国 (境) 教育培训经历)		

Annex C – Position Level Ribbons

Type	Level	Appearance	Type	Level	Appearance
Cmd. officer (指挥管理军官)	CMC vice chairman (军委副主席)		Cmd. officer (指挥管理军官) (cont.)	Battalion (营级正 职)	
	CMC member (军委委员)			Deputy battalion (营级副职)	
	Theater command (战区级正职)			Company (连级正 职)	
	Deputy theater command (战区级副职)			Deputy company (连级副职)	
	Corps (军级正职)			Platoon (排级)	
	Deputy corps (军级副职)		Special. tech. officer (专业技术军官)	Senior (正高职)	
	Division (师级正 职)			Deputy senior (副 高职)	
	Deputy division (师级副职)			Intermediate (中 职)	
	Regiment (团级正 职)			Junior (初职)	
	Deputy regiment (团级副职)		NCO mgmt. role (士兵管理职务)	Staff NCO (军士 参谋)	

Annex C – Position Level Ribbons (cont.)

Type	Level	Appearance	Type	Level	Appearance
NCO mgmt. role (士兵管理职务) (cont.)	Fendui leader (分队长)		NCO mgmt. role (士兵管理职务) (cont.)	Squad leader (班长)	
	Deputy fendui leader (副分队长)			Deputy squad leader (副班长)	

Annex D – Time In Service Ribbons

Type	Name/Level	Appearance	Type	Name/Level	Appearance
Time in service ribbon (军龄略章)	One year (一年)		Time in service ribbon (军龄略章) (cont.)	Eight years (八年)	
	Two years (二年)			Nine years (九年)	
	Three years (三年)			10 years (十年)	
	Four years (四年)			20 years (二十年)	
	Five years (五年)			30 years (三十年)	
	Six years (六年)			40 years (四十年)	
	Seven years (七年)			50 years (五十年)	

Annex E – Type 07 Ribbons

The PLA's former Type 07 system of "seniority ribbons" has been fully retired and replaced, effective January 2023. However, the appearance, meaning, and use of Type 07 ribbons remain relevant to interpreting pre-2023 media, and to understanding what is new under the Type 23 system. Accordingly, this annex explains fundamental aspects of the Type 07 system using images collected from a June 2021 article on PRC online media portal Sina.com.



Figure 11: Type 07 grade ribbons. Source: Sina.com, June 2021.

Annex E – Type 07 Ribbons cont.

Grade Ribbons

The Type 07 ribbon scheme uses 15 colored ribbons to indicate the wearing officer's grade level (级别略章), with either one star (deputy grade) or two stars (full grade). CMC vice chairman and CMC member ribbons are identical. Command (non-technical) and specialized technical officers use the same system of 15 ribbons. Civilian cadres wear the same ribbons based on their equivalent grades. Non-commissioned officers do not wear Type 07 ribbons.



Figure 12: Type 07 time-in-service ribbons. Source: Sina.com, June 2021.

Time-in-Service Ribbons

The 2007 ribbon system uses six ribbons to represent different numbers of years in service (军龄略章). A blank (white) ribbon (装饰略章) is also available to ensure that each row in the wearer's ribbon rack is fully occupied with three ribbons.

Grade	Rows
CMC member or above (军委委员以上)	7
Theater command (战区级) (formerly, military region: 大军区级)	6
Corps (军级)	5
Division (师级)	4
Regiment (团级)	3
Battalion (营级)	2
Company (连级) / Platoon (排级)	1

Figure 13: Rows per grade under the Type 07 system. Source: Sina.com, June 2021.

Rows Reflect Grade

Under the Type 07 ribbon system, the wearer's grade level is shown not only by their position grade badge, but also by the number of rows in their ribbon rack. More senior officers such as theater command or CMC-grade officers have more rows (six and seven, respectively), while comparatively junior officers such as battalion, company, and platoon leaders have fewer rows (two rows, one, and one row respectively).

Annex E – Type 07 Ribbons (cont.)



Figure 14: Example Type 07 ribbon rack. Source: Sina.com, June 2021.



Figure 15: PLA Rear Admiral Zhang Gong wears Type 07 ribbons in this image published in September 2022.

Examples

The image in Figure 14 above shows an example ribbon rack under the Type 07 system. In a Type 07 ribbon rack, a position grade badge occupies the central position in the topmost row. Multiple years-of-service ribbons are used to fill out a number of rows reflecting the wearing officer's grade level. The years-of-service ribbons must also add up to correctly reflect the officer's total time in service. Here, the red badge with two stars signifies a full grade division-level position. Multiple years-of-service ribbons with values ranging from one to ten are used to fill four rows, commensurate with this grade. The years-of-service ribbon values add up to reflect a total of 35 years of service. A single white placeholder ribbon is used to ensure that each row has a full complement of three ribbons (in practice, the ribbon would not have Chinese characters stating that it is a decorative ribbon).

The images in Figure 15 above show another example Type 07 ribbon rack. PLA Navy Rear Admiral (少将) ZHANG Gong (张弓) (shown earlier in this report wearing Type 23 ribbons), is shown here wearing Type 07 ribbons in September 2022 (Zhang's arm badge reflect his position as commander of the Jiangxi Military District (江西省军区司令员)). The orange-colored grade ribbon with two stars in the top row of Rear Admiral Zhang's ribbon rack indicates that he is currently serving in a corps grade position (军级正职). Zhang's ribbon rack has five rows, commensurate with this grade. The additional ribbons in the ribbon rack are time-in-service ribbons: three one-year ribbons, three two-year ribbons, three three-year ribbons, three four-year ribbons, and two five-year ribbons add up to reflect a total of 40 years of service as of the time this photo was taken.