

## Tank Man, 1989

The spring of 1989 saw the largest pro-democracy demonstration in the history of China's communist regime. The protests began in late April among university students, who marched to Tiananmen Square in the center of Beijing. The march turned into a six-week demonstration calling for democratic reforms that spread across the nation, and ended on June 4 with a final deadly assault by an estimated force of 300,000 soldiers from People's Liberation Army (PLA). In the weeks following the Tiananmen massacre, Chinese officials continued to follow the party line that hordes of "counterrevolutionaries" rampaged in Beijing and throughout China and the government had been justified in forcefully ending the rebellion. Tens of thousands were arrested, many were imprisoned, and an unknown number were executed. The government stated "not one person" was killed in Tiananmen Square and only 241 people died when PLA troops and "rioters" fought in the streets. In a June 21, 1989, article, however, New York Times reporter Nicholas D. Kristok estimated that between 400-800 had been killed.

One day after the military crushed the protests, this unarmed young man stood in front of a column of tanks on the Avenue of Eternal Peace. When the tanks tried to go around him, he continued to block their way and eventually climbed onto the lead tank to talk to the soldier inside. He has never been identified, but this image of a citizen standing up to state tyranny has become an inspirational international symbol.



*Photo by Jeff Widener of the Associated Press*

