

TOP GUN!

(Continued from Page 23)

pursuit of better gunnery techniques by all of the 12th's armed helicopter crews.

Chosen: A small target

During the period September 15-22, Major John C. Bahnsen, Assistant S-3 and later Group Project Officer for this task, conducted the "finals" of the armed helicopter standardization point target gunnery training program and test. His goal was to determine the "top gun" of the Group by testing each assault helicopter company's entry.

Firing took place at a point on the Dong Nai River, a half mile wide and just north of Bien Hoa Air Base, using 55-gal. barrels as point targets. The latter were selected intentionally in being very small targets for helicopter weapons. We felt that any crew trained to hit a target of this size consistently would be able to provide more effective and better-controlled combat fire when called upon, with significantly greater safety for friendly troops.

The ground rules . . .

Using all machine guns on the XM-16 equipped armed helicopters, as well as six 2.75" rockets, the selected crews made firing passes in an attempt to sink the barrel within the specified time limit. The ground rules prohibited overflying the target, going below 200' absolute altitude, and flying at an air-speed less than 60 knots.

A maximum of fifteen minutes time was allowed in which to sink the barrel to provide average times that would be meaningful. A complete miss on any one run cost the competing crew the full fifteen minutes, and by doing it this way, the crew could remain in the running since the times of their several runs were averaged.

Each crew was required to fire against four separate barrels, which were dropped individually from 1,000' by a controller aircraft. Stopwatch time from "barrel drop" to "barrel sinking" measured the crew's effectiveness. An "opinion factor" could not enter into this system under these rules of scoring.

Most valuable was the fact that participat-

ing crews and other observers were able to watch the tactics and techniques of other units at close range, thereby profiting from this exposure. In addition, much informal exchange of information took place on the ground. For the first time, proponents of each gunnery technique were required to demonstrate in public the good points — and in some cases, the bad points — of their "technique." Self-styled experts had a chance to prove their expertise. When the *times* and the comments came in, the educational process was both swift and effective.

"Effectiveness" charted

Note the dramatic improvement in effectiveness in the *time* of each crew as it progressed through the competition and after it had the opportunity to observe others in action:

Table I
Times for Sinking Barrel
Preliminary Firing Runs

1st place	118th Bandits		
6:24	6:02	6:09	2:44
2nd place	68th Mustangs		
15:00	4:42	4:01	6:11
3rd place	116th Stingers		
10:28	6:03	7:05	8:05
4th place	173rd Crossbows		
13:10	11:20	12:06	6:33
5th place	197th Sabers		
15:00	12:49	11:14	4:29
6th place	128th Gunslingers		
15:00	7:19	—	—
7th place	162nd Copperheads		
15:00	15:00	10:19	7:09
8th place	A Co, 501st Firebirds		
15:00	15:00	15:00	12:38

Table II
Times for Sinking Barrel
Final Firing Runs

1st place	118th Bandits		
4:01	3:17	(3:39 average)	
2nd place	68th Mustangs		
3:27	4:11	(3:48 average)	
3rd place	116th Stingers		
5:19	6:40	(5.58 average)	

● The armed helicopter machine gun (M6 kit) can, in fact, be used to hit and to destroy