

CAT87

The Canadian Army Trophy, the CAT Shoot, is the premiere NATO Main Battle Tank competition. It is described as the Olympics and World Series of Armor rolled into one. This world-class event, held bi-annually in Germany, pits elite armored units tank-to-tank, to determine NATO's top gunnery Army Group and the top gun of tank platoons.

The CAT competition was originated in 1963 by the Canadians as a means to hone individual tank gunnery skills as well as foster unity between NATO army groups. CAT '87 was hosted by NATO's Central Army Group (CENTAG) at a tank range in Grafenwöhr, West Germany. The Northern Army Group (NORTHAG), representing the visiting team, was coming off the heels of an impressive victory in CAT '85 and was in possession of the coveted CAT trophy.

The one week of intensive competition requires each team to put their hard-earned skills and hard-won reputations on the line. For months, platoons have trained rigorously on their equipment... a demanding routine, but crucial, in the pursuit of a victory.

The spirit of camaraderie was evident in the daily interaction of soldiers from different nations. They were continually exchanging ideas, examining each other's tanks systems, and discussing common interests... a unique gathering of warriors eager to demonstrate their professional skills.

The gunnery expertise of these competitors was displayed each day of the competition. NATO teams gained much respect for skills exhibited by their NATO partners... and a satisfying confidence in the performance of their allies.



Platoons frequently displayed the flags of fellow NATO members on their own tanks. It was not unusual to see a Dutch Leopard II with the Stars & Stripes or an American M1 flying the Canadian Maple Leaf or German Cross.

Before each battle run, all weapons were given a critical final checkout. Training and expertise were about to be put to the test... culminating in a single opportunity to perform at their best.

The atmosphere among the spectators was festive; but when it came down to the wire, every platoon preparing for their turn on the range knew why they were there. Their prior training was now being put to a very demanding test. No room for second best for the soldier/machine system.

Competition

Enthusiastic welcomes greeted each unit at the approach to the first firing position. Much was expected . . . these were the best of the best. Each platoon would have to display expert teamwork and a great deal of confidence in the quality and performance of their tank system under a scenario of realistic combat actions. The CAT competition requires firing at machine gun and moving main gun targets, from both stationary positions and on the move. Point values, totaling a possible 22,600 points, are assigned to all targets. Tabulation of acquisition and engagement time is also factored. Just as in battle, first round hits are a plus. Each crew must have confidence that engaged targets have been hit. Wasted ammo means a possible loss of bonus points.



Action was spirited and scoring among competing British, Belgian, German, Dutch, Canadian, and U.S. units was very tight. These scores were intently monitored by a team of international judges. Going into the final day, the German 124th Panzer Battalion forged ahead of the pack with 19,690 points, 1,400 more than the closest competitor.

The pressure was on the 1st Platoon of Company D, 4th Battalion 8th Cavalry, the last competitor of CAT '67.



Quality Competitors

Tabulation of scoring had been completed just before the closing ceremony began. Scores of the final run of the 1st Platoon, 8th Cavalry were not yet posted. CENTAG was announced as the overall CAT winner, but the high platoon score was still in doubt. Everyone knew the last performance by the 8th Cavalry in their Abrams Tanks was a good one . . . but was it good enough to pass the seemingly insurmountable German score? The announcer proclaimed what everyone was eager to hear, "The high platoon . . . from CENTAG . . . the 1st Platoon, D Company, 4th Battalion, 8th Cavalry." The somewhat formal atmosphere of this awards ceremony erupted. The Americans in their M1s had done it!

Through some impressive team interaction and quick thinking, the 1st Platoon finished with 20,490 points - a display of flawless teamwork and precise system operation.

The top gun accomplishment of the 8th Cavalry, combined with the performances of American 3/64th and German 124th Panzer teammates, helped make CENTAG the victor in CAT '87. The 8th Cav in their M1 Abrams Tanks provided the winning edge for this world class event, setting new standards for tank gunnery. The men and women of General Dynamics Land Systems Division are proud to have produced the tanks that made this victory possible . . . and salute the crews that made it happen.



The U.S. 4/8 Cavalry, 1st Platoon, Company D, in their Improved Performance M1s, had the high platoon score at CAT '87.



The 3/64 Armor, Company A, had the third highest platoon score in the CAT competition, an impressive gunnery performance.



The 2/66 Armor, Company D, led team NORTHAG in consistency of performance, with all 2/66 platoons firing over 17,000 points, amassing a team high 51,829 points.

The commander of CENTAG took great pride in accepting the CAT Trophy on behalf of his German, U.S. and Canadian CENTAG teammates. But none seemed to savor the moment as much as General G. Otis, the Commander of the U.S. Army Forces, Europe, as he presented the high platoon award to the 4th of the 8th Cavalry.