

TIGERCOMP IV

*Top Marine Corps Tank Crews
Test Their Skills at Fort Knox*

by **Second Lieutenant Charles Day**



A Marine Corps Reserve tank crew representing the 4th Tank Battalion, 4th Marine Division (R) won the TIGERCOMP gunnery competition between top crews from active and reserve Marine tank units.

The best Marine tank crews from across the country converged on Ft. Knox October 16th for the 4th annual USMC Tank Gunnery Competition, commonly known as TIGERCOMP, which is held to determine the "Top Crew" from the Marine Corps' four tank battalions.

The gunnery competition is sponsored by the 4th Marine Division. COL James M. McNeal, who is currently the Deputy for Operations, Marine Forces Atlantic, and LTC Jeffery L. Williamson (USMC, Ret.), one-time commander of the Marine Corps detachment, Ft. Knox, are credited with the idea for TIGERCOMP, which was adopted as an annual event in 1996 by the commanding generals of the four Marine divisions.

According to the Marine Forces Reserves PAO, the purpose of the competition is to emphasize and reward excellence; enhance *esprit de corps* among Marine tank units through camaraderie, competition, demonstrated proficiency, and shared experience; and demonstrate the warfighting capabilities of the total force Marine Corps as an integrated fighting force.

TIGERCOMP, characterized by fierce competition, tests a tank crew's decision-making abilities, communication, technical proficiency, and cohesiveness while conducting a Tank Table VIII. In addition to the tank crew contest, this year's event included an antitank competition as four crews from Marine TOW (tube-launched, optically-tracked, wire-guided missile) platoons fired HMMWV-mounted TOWs at targets simulating enemy tanks on Yano Range.

Four tank crews participated in the gunnery event. Active Component tank crews

from Bravo Company, 1st Tank Battalion, 1st Marine Division, 29 Palms, Calif. and Delta Company, 2nd Tank Battalion, 2nd Marine Division, Camp Lejeune, N.C., as well as Reserve Component crews from Charlie Company, 4th Tank Battalion, 4th Marine Division, Boise, Idaho and Charlie Company, 8th Battalion, 4th Marine Division, Tallahassee, Fla.

The top tank crews from their respective battalions arrived at Ft. Knox the 11th of October, drew their tanks lottery style, and worked feverishly throughout the rest of the week to prepare for the main event. Training and crew preparation, however, began long before arrival at Knox. Each tank crew competed in company and battalion gunnery densities as early as May, and, in some cases, defeated up to 53 other tanks in order to earn the right to compete for TIGERCOMP top honors.

Such an event provides interesting challenges for the reserve components, who must spend hours of their personal time training in order to be at their best. SGT Blake Slater, a police officer and student, discussed the added challenge, saying that "it is difficult to get together around work and school schedules. We have to work extra hard at drill and during the time we do have." Although winning is important, and was clearly on the minds of all participating crews, the competition seems to do more than merely present an award and provide publicity. It focuses training and elevates the skills of all soldiers involved, from master gunners, mechanics, and range OICs, to the tank crews themselves. Perhaps one of the more remarkable hidden traits this competition offers is a reason, a challenge if you will, for reserve units, whom we rely more and more on these days, to ensure that they are capable of executing at the same levels as their active duty counterparts. Alternately, active units push themselves to continuously raise standards. A win-win situation.

TIGERCOMP '99, on a perfect fall Saturday, boasted a full grandstand of spectators to watch and listen (a loudspeaker system let them hear each crew's internal net) as each tank conducted its run. In addition to the individual competitive lanes, the event featured all four tanks in a Tank Table XII. This combined effort provided the audience with an impressive display of fire and maneuver capabilities.

After all of the smoke had finally cleared, the tank crew from 4th Battalion, 4th Marine Division (Reserves) emerged with top honors. During an awards ceremony following the competition, guest of honor Brigadier General John A. Gallinetti, Deputy Commander Marine Forces Reserves, addressed the participants and audience congratulating the crews on their hard work and achievements in coming this far. "The competition was fierce and the margin of victory was very close." General Gallinetti also touched on the issue of active and reserve units operating together, an issue which all branches of service face. "One of the greatest attributes of this event is that you saw a total force display, both reserve and active duty crews executing so close that you couldn't tell them apart."

The winning tank crew from Company C, 4th Bn, 4th MarDiv received the Navy/Marine Corps achievement medal, as well as the privilege of holding the McCard trophy and plaque (named for Gunnery Sergeant Robert H. McCard, Medal of Honor recipient) until next year's competition. The top crew consisted of CWO2 Myron C. Severson, Jr., tank commander; SGT Blake A. Slater, gunner; Lance CPL Donald G. Crowell, loader; and Lance CPL Matthew K. Shriver, driver.

2LT Charles Day received his Armor commission from Kansas State University ROTC in December 1998. Currently attending AOB, his first duty assignment will be in Germany.