

IN early October, the 12th Combat Aviation Group culminated an intensive four-month armed helicopter gunnery training program by recognizing the 118th Assault Helicopter Company's *Bandits* as "*top gun*" platoon at an awards ceremony at Bien Hoa, Vietnam.

While not an AAAA function in any form, the final competitions held by the 12th were similar in format and approach to those sponsored by the Army Aviation Ass'n and conducted by the 10th Aviation Group at Fort Benning, Ga. in June, 1966. As you recall, these were conducted with the approval of *MG Robert H. York*, CG of The Infantry Center, and were supported in terms of trophies and pre- and post-meet publicity by the AAAA as the forerunner for a worldwide "*All-Army Annual Gunnery Crew Championship*."

Inadequate fire control

In Vietnam, we noted cases of "hosing down" targets and placing inaccurate fire during '66 combat actions. Inadequate fire control appeared to be the cause. In making a detailed check of the battalions of the 12th, we found that while many gun crews were well trained, a few gunners were inadequate.

Probing further, we determined that inadequate aerial gunnery training time and facilities were responsible. The whole problem was complicated by the fact that several of the units, which had been in Vietnam for a long time, had developed unique — and

By
COL. RAYMOND P. CAMPBELL
Commanding Officer,
12th Combat Aviation Group

sometimes questionable — gunnery procedures of which they were very proud.

Multi-level competition

Publication of an aerial gunnery training program — at a level that could be handled concurrently with the combat mission of the units — was the first step towards improving our gunnery techniques and crew teamwork. A training program was initiated at the company level in June, 1966, one that proceeded through a battalion-level competition and pointed toward a group-level meeting of the top gun crews. By providing a tangible competitive goal towards which crews could train — "*top gun*" status — we felt that participants would expend greater efforts towards attaining precision in marksmanship and control of weapons. Most of the gunnery training was done on combat missions or en route home from them.

At the same time in June, the CG of II Field Force, Vietnam, gave his approval for a small number of helicopters to be assigned to the training mission each day. This command support, coupled with the battalion commanders' acquisition of training ranges and the issuance of sound training directives, were all the impetus needed for the aggressive

TOP GUN!
