

Gunners Set New Tank Records 8/4

By WALLACE MITCHELL
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POHAKULOA — Gunners of Troop E, 19th Cavalry, have set a "phenomenal" shooting record in the first range firing trials of their new M-551 General Sheridan tank.

The 16½-ton cat-quick fighting machine is officially an "Armored Reconnaissance Airborne Vehicle" in the terminology of the Army Weapons Command.

The cavalymen of the 29th Infantry Brigade have been at this Big Island



training area on the flank of Mauna Kea since July 19, after a break-in period with the vehicle at Schofield Barracks.

Maj. Lawrence Tavares, brigade training officer, and Maj. Daniel Brewer of the Weapons Command, said during a briefing and demonstration here that the troopers have quickly adapted to their new weapon.

Quick Conversion

"We had to turn basic foot soldiers into tankers — right from teaching them how to get in and out of a tank and how not to get their fingers pinched in the turret," said Brewer.

"We had to train men as track and chassis mechanics, teach them the fire control optics and guided missile systems and routine maintenance.

"Now we've got crews for the nine operating tanks, four men to a crew. We've got 14 chassis mechanics, 18 turret mechanics, 12 communications men — and many of them are cross-trained in two or more such specialties."

The M-551 fires both conventional ammunition and the magic-eye Shillelagh missile from its 152-mm cannon. It also carries a .50-calibre and a 7.62-mm machine gun, and launchers for eight grenades or smoke cannisters.

"Their experience has been phenomenal with both conventional ammo and the missile," Brewer said of the gunners.

It may be the gunners have a touch of what hunters know as "buck fever" — a tendency to do their worst when being watched.

The only missile miss earlier had been when Maj. Gen. Roy Lasseter, U.S. Army Hawaii commander, and Brig. Gen. Frederick A. Schaefer III were in the field to observe.

In demonstrations Friday, the gunner of one tank missed the moving two-foot square target by three feet.

"It would have spoiled your day if you'd been in that target tank, however," Brewer said.

The second tank waited for the moving target — 1,000 meters across the sand and lava on a gas-powered railroad donkey car — to move into his sights.

He fired. The missile blooped out of the cannon and fell scarcely 300 yards away — a malfunction of the missile.

Just One Chance

Tavares and Brewer offered them no more chances.

"A missile costs about the price of a Chevy, so we don't use many," Tavares explained. "Each gunner gets a crack at a stationary target and one at the moving target."

"But so far, the average miss distance has been six inches from the bullseye," Brewer added.

The two tank crews then gave a demonstration of the speed the maneuverability of their weapon. Platoon Sgt. Thomas K. Lopez of Wahiawa, tank commander



Sheridan tank roars across Pohakuloa lava, hurling up rock and cinders.

with Pfc. David L. Kaea, 89-349 Pua Ave., Nanakuli, sent up a roosters-tail of brown silt as they roared down a slope.

"He's really flying that thing," remarked Brewer.

S. Sgt. Howard F. Garcia, 1722 Moani St., brought the second down at about the same speed, with Sp. 4 Garrett Passos of Waialua at the controls. Hardly slowing, they threw the tank

into a tight 90-degree turn that plowed up sand and chunks of lava.

"Do that with a conventional vehicle and you'd be throwing tank track all over!" Tavares said.