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# USA Narrowly Misses medals at 27th NATO Chess Championship

By [Colonel David A Hater](#) | September 6, 2016 | [News](#)



While the chess world is focused on the Olympiad ongoing right now in Baku, the most important military team championship recently concluded in Shrivenham, England. From August 21-26, teams from 16 NATO countries met in a 7 round swiss to determine the individual and team champions for 2016. The event is an individually paired swiss with the top four scores added to determine a country's team score. Countries may have up to 6 players on their roster, though some field only four and some countries do not even send full teams. In addition to the 16 official teams, there were three combined teams of captains and team officials that play in the tournament but their scores do not count for their countries as they are not on the 6 player roster. This year there was not a clear pre-tournament favorite as in many past years. Germany's top players were not available this year due to military duties. This marked the first time since 2000 that there were no IMs or GMs playing in the tournament. In the previous 26 years, Germany played 25 times taking Gold 21 times and Silver 3 times only failing to medal once – missing medals by half a point in 1994. This year though Germany was second seeded to Poland. Poland is a relative newcomer to NATO. However, since they started playing in 2003, they have earned 9 Silver and 3 Bronze. They only failed to win medals once in 2011 missing by only 1 point. This year Poland had the highest average team at 2195

FIDE. Germany was second at 2167 and Denmark 3<sup>rd</sup> at 2142. USA had an average rating of 2075. Romania had only four players and their average was 2132. In comparison, USA's top 4 would be 2147. USA was in medal contention throughout the tournament. We scored even or plus in all but two rounds. Unfortunately, we added only 1 ½ points in round 6 and we were in 4<sup>th</sup> place headed to the last round. We would have needed a 4-0 performance in the last round to medal and that is just too tall of an order in the last round of an international competition. Going into the last round, Germany was leading with 18 points, Poland and Denmark had 17 ½ and USA had 15 ½. Poland had a big round picking up 3 points to finish at 20 1/2. Germany got 2 ½ to also get to 20 ½. So Poland and Germany tied for first with Poland taking Gold on tiebreak, Denmark was ½ point back and took Bronze. All three teams finished greater than 20 points. To have all three teams place their top 4 averaging more than 5 points in a 7 round tournament is a huge achievement. USA finished at 17 ½. That was the same number that won bronze for USA two years ago, but wasn't good enough this year. Even though we did not come away with a medal, there were many bright spots for USA. Our top player Army Specialist Dharim Bacus scored 5-2 to tie for 5<sup>th</sup> overall. Here is his last round victory over a Denmark player. This victory cost prevented Denmark from tying for first place.

## NATO Championship

2016.08.26

Bacus, Dharim

Nilsson, Erik

*Annotated by Hater, David*

Before the start of the game I was very worried of a drawish line like a Petroff. I needed a full point badly for my team to catch up with the leading teams. We were staring each other and I knew he is thinking of a good reply to my e4 games he probably saw in databases. That's when I decided to play 1. Nf3! My old repertoire which he cannot see in databases 1. [Nf3 d5](#) 2. [d4 e6](#) 3. [c4 c6](#) 4. [Nc3 dc4](#) 5. [a4 Bb4](#) 6. [g3 Nf6](#) 7. [Bg2 Nd5](#) 8. [Bd2 b5](#) I was shock with this move. I was calculating the line 8... - a5 in order to secure the knight to b6 and hold on to the c4 pawn for a moment while preparing to set up the queen side pieces. 9. [Nd5?!](#) My opponent is afraid of this move and offered me a draw which I declined. I wanted a full point and not satisfied to split the score. But my incautious approach in the position leads to black's equality due to letting the initiative slip away. 9. O-O! would have been better. If 9... - O-O 10. Nd5 - Bd2 11. Nf6+ - Qf6 13. Qd2 and the diagonal h1 to a8 is too much for black to handle; while 9... - Bc3 10. bc3 - O-O 11. Qb1 - a6 12. Ng5 - f5 (or 12... - g6 13. Ne4! Controlling dark squares is better for white) 13. e4 - Nc3 14. Bc3 - Qg5 15. h4 - Qd8 16. ef5! Again white's light squared diagonal is a force to reckon with. 9... [Bd2](#) 10. [Qd2 cd5?](#) I was thinking of 10... - ed5 for more than 20 minutes trying to scan everything, then suddenly he played cd5 quickly. After the game I asked him why he didn't play it. His response is he didn't want extended pawns on d5 and b5 and was afraid of my breaks on e4. 11. [ab5 Qb6](#) 12. [Qa5?!](#) Again I lost the initiative with this move. 12. Ne5 would have been better maintaining the initiative - for example 12... - Qb5 13. Ra5 - Qb3 14. Qc3 with the idea of capturing the c4 pawn with the knight.) 12... [Nd7](#) 13. [Qb6 Nb6](#) 14. [Ra5 a6](#) 15. [O-O ab5](#) 16. [Rb5 Ra6](#) 17. [e4 Bd7](#) 18. [Rb4 O-O](#) 19. [Ne5 Ba4?](#) A strategic error. A simple 19... - Be8 and black is still in the game though white is slightly better. 20. [Ra1! Rfa8](#) 21. [ed5 ed5](#) 22. [Nc4!! Bb5??](#) 23. [Ra6 Ra6](#) 24. [Rb5](#) 1-0

Another bright spot was our second highest rated player, Navy Lieutenant Chase Watters. Chase scored 4 ½. His only two losses were to the champion FM Finn Pedersen and past NATO Champion FM Fabrice Wantiez. Chase also arranged for GM Alex Onischuk to give lessons to the team to prepare for the tournament. Not everybody could take advantage, but those who did clearly benefited. Watters was on board one versus Pedersen in round four as they were the only perfect scores to that point. Unfortunately, Pedersen prevailed and he went on to win clear first place.

NATO-CH 27TH

2016.08.24

Watters, Chase Miles

Pedersen, Finn

1. [d4 d5](#) 2. [Bf4 Nf6](#) 3. [e3 Bg4](#) 4. [f3 Bd7](#) 5. [Bd3 c5](#) 6. [c3 Nc6](#) 7. [Ne2 Qb6](#) 8. [Qb3 c4](#) 9. [Qb6 ab6](#) 10. [Bc2 b5](#)  
11. [Nd2 b4](#) 12. [O-O e6](#) 13. [e4 b5](#) 14. [e5 Ng8](#) 15. [Be3 g6](#) 16. [Rfb1 Nge7](#) 17. [Nf1 Nc8](#) 18. [b3 Be7](#) 19. [bc4 bc4](#)  
20. [Bd2 bc3](#) 21. [Bc3 Ba3](#) 22. [Rb7 Na5](#) 23. [Rc7 Kd8](#) 24. [Ba5 Ra5](#) 25. [Rb7 Re8](#) 26. [Rab1 Re7](#) 27. [Ne3 Bc6](#)  
28. [Rb8 Rea7](#) 29. [Nd1 Ra8](#) 30. [Ra8 Ra8](#) 31. [Nec3 Ra5](#) 32. [Kf1 Kc7](#) 33. [f4 Nb6](#) 34. [g4 Nd7](#) 35. [h4 Be7](#)  
36. [h5 Ra3](#) 37. [hg6 hg6](#) 38. [Ke2 g5](#) 39. [f5 Ne5](#) 40. [fe6 fe6](#) 41. [de5 d4](#) 42. [Kd2 dc3](#) 43. [Nc3 Ra5](#) 44. [a4 Re5](#)  
45. [Bd1 Bf6](#) 46. [Be2 Rc5](#) 47. [Rc1 Be5](#) 48. [Rc2 Bf4](#) 49. [Ke1 Kb6](#) 50. [Nb1 Be4](#) 51. [Rb2 Ka5](#) 52. [Nc3 Bc6](#)  
53. [Bd1 Re5](#) 54. [Ne2 Be3](#) 55. [Kf1 Bf3](#) 56. [Nc3 Bd1](#) 57. [Nd1 Bd4](#) 58. [Ra2 Re4](#) 59. [Kg2 Rg4](#) 60. [Kf3 Rf4](#)  
61. [Kg3 c3](#) 62. [Kg2 e5](#) 63. [Kg3 Rf1](#) 64. [Nc3 Bc3](#) 65. [Kg4 Rg1](#) 66. [Kf3 Bd4](#) 67. [Ke4 g4](#) 68. [Kf5 g3](#) 69. [Kg4 Be3](#)  
70. [Kf3 Bf4](#) 71. [Kg4 Rf1](#) 72. [Kh3 Rh1](#) 73. [Kg4 Rh2](#) 74. [Ra1 g2](#) 75. [Rg1 Be3](#) 0-1



*GM Keene presents Gold to FM Pedersen*

Pedersen has been playing for Denmark for several year's. He is always on the top boards and has previously won an individual Silver and Bronze. This year he scored 6 ½ out of 7 for a 2605 performance rating and the Gold Medal. Finn also won the Blitz tournament scoring 7-2. Two individual Gold medals and a team bronze is a pretty good week! Everyone on the USA team had an even or plus score. Even our extra players mostly finished with even or plus scores. The results of the USA players are:

**Team USA**

Army Specialist Dharim Bacus	5-2	Tied 5 <sup>th</sup>	(9 <sup>th</sup> on tiebreak)
Navy Lieutenant Chase Watters	4½ - ½	Tied 14 <sup>th</sup>	(14 <sup>th</sup> on tiebreak)
Air Force Master Sergeant Robert Keough	4 – 3	Tied 24 <sup>th</sup>	(25 <sup>th</sup> on tiebreak)
Navy Petty Officer Enrico Balmaceda	4 – 3	Tied 24 <sup>th</sup>	(29 <sup>th</sup> on tiebreak)
Air Force Staff Sergeant Andrew Duren	3 ½ - 3 ½	Tied 47 <sup>th</sup>	(47 <sup>th</sup> on tiebreak)
Air Force Captain Gordon Randall	3 ½ - 3 ½	Tied 47 <sup>th</sup>	(48 <sup>th</sup> on tiebreak)

**Team Officials and Veterans**

Marine Staff Sergeant (retired) John Farrell	4-3	Tied 24 <sup>th</sup>	(39 <sup>th</sup> on tiebreak)
Army Colonel Gregory Risk		3 ½ - 3 ½	Tied 47 <sup>th</sup> (55 <sup>th</sup> on



tiebreak)	Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Charles Musselman	3 ½ - 3 ½	Tied
47 <sup>th</sup>	(60 <sup>th</sup> on tiebreak) Navy Chief Petty Officer Albert Ryan Hernandez		3-
4	Tied 61 <sup>st</sup>	(64 <sup>th</sup> on tiebreak) Army Colonel David	
Hater		3-4	Tied 61 <sup>st</sup> (69 <sup>th</sup> on tiebreak)



Not all was just chess. There was an opportunity for sightseeing on one day as well as building relationships with our allies. Every year at the halfway point of the tournament there is a tour of one of the host country's attractions. This year the tour was to Windsor Castle. After the tournament, there is an optional blitz championship. Many members of the USA opted to go see Stonehenge rather than play in the blitz event.



Look for even more detailed coverage in the November issue of Chess Life. Next year's NATO Championship will be in Budapest, Hungary from March 27<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup>. Interested military members should contact Colonel (retired) David Hater at [dhater1@aol.com](mailto:dhater1@aol.com) for details on how to apply. Applications are due no later than November 15<sup>th</sup>.