

“Thunderbolts” return from Key West

By 1stLt. N. J. Episcopo
 Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA)-251 “Thunderbolts” were greeted Monday by their new Commanding Officer, Major D. A. Richwine, as they stepped off a C-130 “Hercules” aircraft from Key West, Fla.

A detachment of “Thunderbolts” were in Key West for two weeks, receiving VMFA-312, who had been there since early May. Both squadrons had the mission of “providing aircraft to prevent harassment of United States vessels or aircraft by non-U.S. forces during the humanitarian efforts,” according to First Lieutenant N. J. Episcopo, VMFA-251 training officer. Crews manned the “hot pad”, or ready area, in support of the Cuban refugees’ flight from their homeland. “Hot pad” status means aircrews must be ready to “scramble” (launch)

aircraft at a moment’s notice, whenever an airborne or surface threat is detected.

The situation was unusual and circumstances difficult, but, “. . . for the few Marines down there, the different shops worked together to do a superior job,” says Staff Sergeant Stephen Lindemood, of ‘251’s electric shop.

But, even the importance of their mission couldn’t dampen their spirits and Florida’s sunny skies and mild climate affected the Marines. “Though the hours were long,” says 1stLt. Episcopo, “the men did find some time for enjoying the good weather and scenery of the “Keys”. In the words of Plane Captain, Corporal C. M. Pitarys, the liberty was “Great! One of the best I’ve ever seen.”

Their mission remained one of readiness. “Our squadron’s Marines were busy turning

wrenches here in Beaufort, too,” says 1stLt. Episcopo. “Between their assistance and hard work

in Key West, we were able to maintain total readiness and accomplish our mission.”



Photo by Sgt. E. A. Schmick

UNLOADING — Sergeant D. F. Zganjar (right), of VMFA-251 radar, hands a seabag to Staff Sergeant Stephen Lindemood, ‘251 electric shop. The two Marines and other members of their squadron returned here Monday from a deployment in Key West.