



# THE T-BOLTER

A publication for all Marines who have served with VMFA-251 from World War II to the present.

Volume 1, Number 1

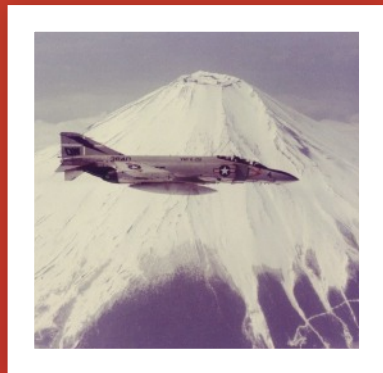
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## Want to contribute?

This semi-regular newsletter, if it is to have a long life, will depend on you to contribute articles, photos, or your own story about 251. Articles and stories can be any length, whatever you are comfortable with. So put those pen and pencils to paper or start striking that keyboard, and send them my way!

I prefer articles and stories to be in either .doc or docx format, but any will do. Pictures should be jpeg format and at high resolution. When sending them, be sure to include your name for proper attribution.

Items can be sent to [frenchy@vmfa251.org](mailto:frenchy@vmfa251.org) or snail mailed to Steve Dixon, 404 Calgary Drive, Peachtree City, Georgia, 30269.



## Who served with VMFA-251? Courtesy of NASA



In September 1966, Norm Thagard entered active duty with the United States Marine Corps Reserve. He achieved the rank of Captain in 1967, was designated a naval aviator in 1968, and was subsequently assigned to duty flying F-4s with VMFA-333 at Marine Corps Air Station, Beaufort, South Carolina. He flew 163 combat missions in Vietnam while assigned to VMFA-115 from January 1969 to 1970. He returned to the United States and an assignment as aviation weapons division officer with VMFA-251 at the Marine Corps Air Station, Beaufort, South Carolina.

Thagard resumed his academic studies in 1971, pursuing additional studies in electrical engineering, and a degree in medicine; prior to coming to NASA, he was interning in the Department of Internal Medicine at the Medical University of South Carolina. He is a licensed physician.

He is a pilot and has logged over 2,200 hours flying time--the majority in jet aircraft.

Dr. Thagard was selected as an astronaut candidate by NASA in January 1978. In August 1979, he completed a one-year training and evaluation period, making him eligible for assignment as a mission specialist on future Space Shuttle flights. A veteran of five space flights, he has logged over 140 days in space. He was a mission specialist on on STS-7 in 1983, STS 51-B in 1985, STS-30 in 1989, was the payload commander on STS-42 in 1992, and was the cosmonaut/researcher on the Russian Mir 18 mission in 1995.

Dr. Thagard retired from NASA in December 1995 and returned to his alma mater, Florida State University to take the position of Visiting Professor and Director of External Relations for the Florida A&M University - Florida State University College of Engineering, Tallahassee.

# KOREA, 1955

## 251 detachment tagged to carry nukes...

Some Interesting Info from the 50's  
By Ken Church

I was in VMA 251 from August 1955 at K-3 Korea until October 1956 when I left Japan to come home. The squadron was divided into two units with the main unit being at Iwakuni and a smaller Special Weapons Delivery Unit at Atsugi, Japan. I was in that Unit most of 1956.

When I joined the squadron at K-3 in August of 55' Col. Robert Holmes was the C.O. and our Atsugi Detachment already existed I believe. Col. Joe Quilty took over the K-3 Squadron in about October and the Exec was Major Charley Crew. We moved the squadron back to Iwakuni, Japan in January 1956 when the whole Air Wing moved out of K-3.

The Detachment at Atsugi was a nuclear weapons delivery unit, thus the name "Special Weapons Delivery Unit" and to my knowledge we were the only such Unit in Japan. The Air Force had the capability elsewhere in the Pacific but not as close to China and North Korea. We were referred to as the "Thin Blue

Line" because of the small size (only 8 planes at that time) of the unit. Major Edgar L. Smith was the Detachment C.O. and Capt. Kenny Weir (later Maj.Gen.) was the Exec. We were flying AD-4's and 6's with the light gray reflective paint job.



A Skyraider of VMA-251 based at Atsugi, Japan circa 1955. Photo: Jay Velie, courtesy of [www.abledogs.com](http://www.abledogs.com)



Main Street at K-6. Picture from Cpl Nick van der Does



## What Happened to the Corsair?

2nd Lt. Hugh Emmett Irwin suffered only slight injuries when a hung bomb exploded when he returned to VMF-251's base on Samar Island after flying ground support missions for the Army on Cebu Island. The fuselage aft of the cockpit was blown to bits. Date -- April 8, 1945.



# WESTPAC 1977-78



## VMFA-251 Relieves VMFA-115 at MCAS Iwakuni

On 22 July 1977, VMFA-251 deployed to MCAS Iwakuni and relieved VMFA-115, VMFA-115 had been in the Far East for 12 years, and were ready to go home.

During its stay at Iwakuni, 251 participated in numerous exercises, and deployed several times – twice to South Korea, the Philippines and Okinawa.

I would hazard to guess that our deployment to the Philippines was for many our most memorable trip.

The Thunderbolts were relieved by VMFA-122 in July 1978, and returned to MCAS Beaufort, and most Mairnes were granted a well earned leave period. It was also at this time that 251 received an influx of Marines as others who had been with the squadron were transferred.

### Who Remembers This?

From Lt. Col. Joseph Coppola, USMC, Ret.

The barracks lock-in while we were stationed at MCAS Iwakuni during the infamous WestPac Tour of 77 - 78. If you know the details (your editor was there but cannot remember the exact circumstances) write to me for inclusion in the next issue!

Editors Note: Joe was in radar shop as a corporal during the WestPac deployment in 1977.

### Picture Notes:

Inset: On the flight line in South Korea during Operation Team Spirit in March of 1978.

251 F-4J Phantom II over the skies of Japan during the WestPac tour.

### "ODE TO THE ISLANDS"

I was down in P. I., in a bar called FISH EYE, and the weekend was well under way. It was Saturday night, I was feeling alright and my bar hooker asked me to stay.

Well we got home at twelve, and I started to delve in her gorgeous, yet battle-worn bod. And it was well after dawn, with my adrenaline gone that I knew I had worn out my rod.

So I grabbed a few Z's, and left her quite pleased as I headed for my station-bound trip. A quick shower I tended, and I thought it had ended until Wednesday, when I started to drip.

The Squids in sick-bay looked me over all day as if checking to be perfectly sure Till the Doc shook his head, and whispering, said....

"Son--it's the kind we can't cure."

Jerry Johnston 10-01-77

# GOLDEN WRENCH AWARD



At the time this photo was taken in 2012, Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 251 was deployed aboard aircraft carrier USS Enterprise in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. The carrier was in its 25th and final voyage before decommissioning after more than 50 years of service. DoD Photo.

## VMFA-251 Receives Golden Wrench Award

Story by Lance Cpl. Rubin Tan  
Thursday, September 9, 2012

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION BEAUFORT, S.C. - The Thunderbolts of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 251 were awarded the "Golden Wrench Award" while embarked aboard the USS Enterprise. The award is given every two months to acknowledge a squadron maintenance department whose performance is impeccable while safely maintaining mission-ready aircraft.

Navy Capt. Robert Boyer, Carrier Air Wing 1 [CVW-1] commander aboard the Enterprise, presented the squadron the award for their performance in aircraft maintenance during July and August. During the evaluation period, the squadron was also reviewed for cleanliness of maintenance areas, accuracy of maintenance logs, maintenance practices and other criteria set by CVW-1.

While the Golden Wrench Award is not available in all carrier air wings, it is seen as a

great achievement within CVW-1. The award serves to highlight the hard work and dedication of those Sailors and Marines who work behind the scenes keeping aircraft mission ready.

"Our mission is to not create competitiveness, but to evaluate the steps a squadron makes to become mission ready and effective," said Navy Lt. Cmdr. Kenneth Sanchez, the Maintenance Officer for CVW-1.

However, many of the Marines of VMFA-251 credit teamwork as being the driving force that earned them the award.

"If we don't work as a team we would never accomplish the mission at hand, which is why it is important to teach new Marines teamwork starting from day one," said Master Sgt. Aaron Bense, the maintenance material control chief for VMFA-251 and a native of Woodbine, Ga.

Although much of the maintenance can be tedious and demanding, it is an essential

element in ensuring the air wing is poised to complete the mission at hand.

"[The Squadron's] professionalism, knowledge, sacrifice and willingness to do maintenance by the book and right the first time has earned us the title of best maintenance department in the air wing," said Lt. Col. Simon Doran, the commanding officer of VMFA-251 and native of Liverpool, England. "The hard work from our Marines continues to give the squadron great jets that are making a difference for the Marines and coalition ground forces."

During the previous cycle, the Golden Wrench was awarded to the Checkmates of Strike Fighter Squadron 211. The Thunderbolts flew more than 1,100 hours during the two-month evaluation period in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

“ If we don't work as a team we would never accomplish the mission at hand, which is why it is important to teach new Marines teamwork starting from day one. ”