

VMO - 251

(1 December, 1941 to 30 October 1942)

VMO-251 was commissioned on 1 December, 1941, at the Naval Air Station, North Island, California. It was commissioned as a squadron of Marine Air Group 21, then stationed at Ewa, Oahu, T.H., from which Group and place several of its first officers and key enlisted personnel came.

Several months after commissioning, and while still at North Island in the fitting out stage, VMO-251 was detached from MAG 21 and was assigned to the direct control of Headquarters, Second Marine Aircraft Wing, then also at North Island. VMO-251 thereafter remained a separate squadron under the Second Wing until late August, 1942, when it was officially detached to the First Marine Aircraft Wing. At this time the squadron was based at Espiritu Santos, in the New Hebrides Islands. It had been overseas since June 17, 1942, operating for the most part as an independent squadron under the operational control of Commander, Aircraft, South Pacific.

The initial conception of the aircraft with which VMO-251 was to be equipped included both the convertible (land and sea plane) cruiser based type observation airplane and the amphibious type patrol plane (or PBY-5A). Not until about late March of 1942 was it apparent that this conception had undergone a change. At this time word was received at Headquarters, Second Marine Aircraft Wing that it was the intention of the Navy to equip the squadron with SBD type airplanes.

The Marines did not like the idea of the SBD's for two reasons: first, because they felt the squadron would eventually end up as a carrier-based dive bombing squadron; and, second, because, following the experience of the British in North Africa, they felt that a high-speed airplane with remote controlled camera installation would provide the best type of observation airplane. As a result, the marines submitted a counter recommendation.

This counter recommendation made by the Marines was approved in due course of time, and about the first of May, 1942, sixteen F4F-3 airplanes were put ashore from one of the aircraft carriers then in San Diego and turned over to VMO-251.

While all of the aircraft had to be sent to the Air Station A&R for the modifications necessary to make them into photographic planes, many of the planes were also in need of varying degrees of overhaul. Hence it was that, as soon as the airplanes were received, eight of the sixteen had to be turned into the Air Station for needed work. When these were returned to the squadron, the other eight had to be turned in. So that, with the squadron moving overseas on the 17th of June, never more than eight F4F-3's were available for training prior to embarkation.

Added to the eight F4F-3's were certain miscellaneous aircraft which, having been previously assigned to the squadron, were allowed to remain. These aircraft consisted of: two SNJ's, and one J2F-4, and two Brewster fighters (these latter remaining for a short time only).

The limited number of aircraft was only one of several problems - some, quite unique - which confronted the embryo squadron from the time it received its complement of airplanes until it sailed for overseas duties. Others included the rapid assimilation of personnel (not unique); taking part in the filming of the motion picture, "Wake Island"; acquiring material and supplies for independent operations; and finally, loading ship in such a manner that the squadron could proceed in two parts by separate routes, with the aircraft stowed in the between-deck spaces of a Navy transport.

Until receipt of the F4F-3's, eight officers were the maximum ever to be in the squadron at any one time. Of the original officers, four of the older ones had been detached only recently to other units and four young lieutenants received in their place. These latter were from the Carrier Indocrination Course, (then being conducted at North Island), from whence

also came most of the additional pilots VMO-251 was to receive. Only a few of the latter were fortunate enough to complete the Indoctrination Course before they were reassigned; while all from this source lacked prior service experience. Following receipt of the F4F-3's, pilot and other officer strength of the squadron rose until, by the 10th of June, it had reached a total of 27. During the same period the enlisted strength increased from an average of ninety (90) to 272.

The making of the moving picture, "Wake Island" during the latter part of the month of May required the services of all eight F4F-3's, with an equal number of pilots, for two weeks. Planes (with VMF-211 markings) and personnel operated first on an improvised airfield along the shores of the Salton Sea and later at Salt Lake City.

By the middle of May, it was fairly firm that the squadron would move out in June to New Zealand, where it would join the First Marine Division. This prospective employment meant that, without benefit of other nearby aviation activities, the squadron would have to be largely self-sustaining, and that equipment and supplies, commonly available only to a group or higher organization would have to be obtained. Obtaining such supplies and equipment in the early days of the war when Tables of Allowances were still a law unto themselves; constituted no minor undertaking; and much arguing and begging had to be resorted to before final authority in each case was granted. The squadron, however, <sup>was</sup> eminently successful in its requests for additional equipment; and it is well that it was, since the quantity and diversity of the equipment obtained was one of the major factors in the squadron's ability to successfully accomplish the manifold tasks encountered.

The task of drawing up adequate loading plans for embarkation also produced considerably more of a problem than might have been expected normally. When it was finally ascertained that VMO-251 was to proceed overseas on the U.S.S. HEYWOOD, a Navy transport, it was also found that other units of the FMF were scheduled to go aboard the same vessel and that these units were

none too definitely decided upon at that time. After considerable uncertainty and delay, during which the matter was obviously tossed back and forth between Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, the Department of the Pacific, the First Amphibious Corps, the Eleventh Naval District Headquarters, the Second Marine Air Wing and the Naval Air Station, North Island, certain information began to trickle in with some shape and body to it; in fact with so much shape and body that it was readily apparent that the U.S.S. HEYWOOD could in no way accommodate all that was supposed to go into it. Another vessel was therefore drawn from the board which would be used to transport a part of the supplies and equipment of VMO-251 -- at least from San Diego to San Francisco where, it was hoped, further transportation would be available to speed this component overseas.

Loading plans thus had to be made for two ships, with corresponding division of squadron material, equipment and personnel. Realizing the possibility of wide dispersion in arrival dates and places overseas of the two components, it was decided to place aboard the HEYWOOD all personnel, (with the exception of a security detachment for the gear which would proceed by the second vessel), the tactical aircraft, and such essential supplies and equipment as would enable the squadron to set up and function for a limited period of time after arrival. The additional utility aircraft and the supplies and equipment which would be essential for prolonged operations were to be placed aboard the second vessel. The general soundness of this division was made apparent, when, as it later developed, the second ship did not arrive at the squadron's location for almost two months after the squadron had disembarked from the HEYWOOD at Noumea, New Caledonia. By that time the squadron had not only moved out to Tontouta airfield, where it had set up aircraft, and started training, but had also moved from that base to Espiritu Santos where it had set up and started flying combat air patrols.

The task of loading aircraft into the between-deck spaces of a Navy transport which, in addition to carrying the major portion of VMO-251 was also transporting the rear echelon of the 1st Raider Battalion (then

Lieutenant Colonel Edson, commanding) and a battalion of the 22d Marines, also constituted a problem probably unique in the annals of World War II. Even after paper plans were made, considerable minute physical measuring of the cargo spaces and cargo hatches was necessary before a successful fit could be assured. Eventually, however, all the F4F-3's, minus wing surfaces, tail surfaces, and propellers were loaded aboard. The latter items, being crated, were then maneuvered into hold spaces or disposed against the bulkheads.

Loading completed, the HEYWOOD sailed from San Diego on 17 June.

The first stop of the vessel was to be Samoa, where the replacement battalion and the rear echelon of the Raiders were to be disembarked. The vessel was then to proceed to New Zealand and discharge VMO-251. The squadron would report to the Commanding General, 1st Marine Division, at that place for duty.

Upon arrival at Tutuila, Samoa, however, the squadron commander was informed that the destination of the squadron had been changed by dispatch orders from Washington, and that instead of proceeding to New Zealand as planned it would go to Noumea, New Caledonia, where it would report to Commander, Aircraft, South Pacific, for duty.

After four days in the Samoan Islands, during which time the vessel voyaged to Apia, British Samoa, to disembark the replacement battalion, it got underway for Noumea. VMO-251 aboard was not alone, however. Instead of disembarking the rear echelon of the Raider Battalion as planned, the vessel had not only retained this unit aboard but had also picked up Lieutenant Colonel Edson and his forward echelon. All hands then suspected that something new and radical was afoot.

Noumea was reached about the first of July. The vessel put into the dock and the squadron immediately began disembarkation. The squadron commander, in compliance with his orders, reported to COMAIRSOPAC aboard his flagship, the CURTISS, which was then in Noumea harbor. There he was informed that his squadron was to move to Tontouta airfield, about thirty-five miles distant from Noumea.

and set up aircraft as soon as possible. Personnel were to move to a campsite selected by the Army about five miles further north.

The move to Tontouta and the campsite, and the subsequent necessity for moving back and forth between the campsite and airfield were causes for considerable confusion during the days to follow. In the first place, the HEYWOOD had a quick turn-around schedule to execute; and the Army, which was furnishing the transportation for the initial move of the squadron to Tontouta, had orders to clear the dock as soon as physically possible. In the rush that followed, items of equipment intended for the campsite went to the airfield and items badly needed at the airfield went to the campsite. The task of unscrambling this equipment, as well as that of moving the hundred odd men back and forth from the camp, where they lived initially, to the airfield where they worked, and of feeding them while there, was then left to the squadron. Although some transportation from local Army sources was available to assist, the majority of this work had to be accomplished by the transportation which the squadron had with it; and this was little enough. Three small tractors for towing aircraft and four jeeps comprised all the transportation which the squadron had been able to bring with it on the HEYWOOD; and although sufficient for the purposes conceived it was definitely not equal to the task imposed at Tontouta. Nevertheless, within four to five days following arrival at Noumea, and after it became possible to billet and subsist many of the personnel more or less permanently at the airfield, the work on erecting the aircraft was initiated.

Tontouta at best was no place to set up aircraft, since maintenance facilities were non-existent. To further complicate matters, upon disassembly of the wing crates it was found that many wing bolts were missing. Fortunately, for the squadron some machine tools were available nearby; and within a short while new wing bolts had been turned to replace the missing ones. As uncrating of parts and erection proceeded, additional discrepancies were noted -- so many in fact that they gave rise to a suspicion of sabotage. As a consequence, a letter was written to the commanding officer of the Air Station

at North Island setting forth the facts. It was the Assembly and Repair Section at the Air Station which had undertaken the disassembly of the planes and crating of the parts prior to shipment.

About the middle of July while the squadron was setting up aircraft, the squadron commander was called aboard the CURTISS for a conference with Admiral McCain, then Commander Aircraft, South Pacific. Admiral McCain wanted to know how far the F4F-3P's could fly. He was given what was considered the safe range for the average of the squadron aircraft, based upon what few tests had been possible with them prior to leaving North Island. He then inquired if belly tanks were available; and was informed that they were not. (Prior to leaving North Island the squadron was informed that belly tanks for the F4F-3P's were available in Hawaii. The squadron had then sent a dispatch to Hawaii in an effort to obtain them. Nothing was heard from the dispatch and the tanks did not arrive prior to sailing.) Admiral McCain next inquired as to the state of training of the pilots, including their qualifications as combat fighter pilots. He was given as accurate an appraisal as possible, and was told that outside of their training in schools, they had received little more than familiarization in F4F-3P's. Some few, he was informed, had had some observation training. He then inquired if the guns were still in the planes; and if so, was ammunition available. He was answered in the affirmative in both cases. He then informed the squadron commander that all effort was to be made to get the planes in the air at the earliest possible time and to initiate intensive training -- not in observation work, but in fighter tactics and gunnery.

Shortly after the above trip to the CURTISS, the squadron commander was again called aboard. This time he was informed that the First Division had requested that seven officers of VMO-251 be sent to it for purposes of gunnery observation. Since the depletion of the squadron of seven officers -- and seven officers who could in any way be expected to do gunnery observation work meant seven pilots -- would have left the squadron with fewer pilots than

considered advisable, COMAIRSOPAC acquiesced to the request that only five be sent. Accordingly, five officers under Captain William R. "Soupy" Campbell were alerted and made ready. By nightfall they were aboard an outbound destroyer.

The exact type of mission on which these five officers had embarked was not known; and nothing further was heard of them until <sup>one day</sup> in the middle of August when three of them, dressed in sailors dungarees, were encountered by squadron officers aboard the CURTISS in the harbor of Espiritu Santos. They had only recently arrived in the harbor aboard an APA and were in the process of enquiring where the squadron was. These three officers were Captain William R. "Soupy" Campbell, Lieutenant Robert T. Whitten, and Lieutenant Roy T. Spurlock. They had been aboard the U.S.S. ASTORIA serving in the rear seats of the cruiser's SOC airplanes as observers for the Guadalcanal landings. They were aboard this vessel on the night of the 8th of August when the ship, along with three other U.S. cruisers, had been so badly mauled by the Japanese that she finally sank.

Following the meeting aboard the CURTISS these three officers came ashore and rejoined the squadron.

Nothing was ever seen of the other two officers, Lieutenants Carl I. Schuessler and William P. Kirby, and very little was ever learned concerning their actions except that they had been serving in a similar capacity aboard the U.S.S. VINCENNES, another vessel of that unfortunate quartet. The VINCENNES, it will be remembered, sank almost immediately. It is presumed that these officers were either killed during the action or drowned when the vessel sank.

Following the departure of the above five officers from New Caledonia, did what they could to prepare for their future roles as fast as aircraft the remaining personnel of the squadron were assembled, pilots were sent into the air to learn the tactics and gunnery of the fighter pilot. Other personnel, when work permitted, were given such training as practicable. During this time only a few of the photographers found anything exciting. They were ordered to fly with the Army B-17's which, operating from New Caledonia, were then engaged in preliminary reconnaissance and bombardment missions in the Solomons.



Seventeen photographers were available in the squadron, and these initial jaunts with Army bombardment from New Caledonia were only the beginning of their more consistent flights with the 11th Bombardment Group from Espiritu Santos. Flights from the latter place included at times a VMO-251 photographer in every plane. The practice continued over several months. In most cases photography appears to have been relegated to second place, since reports indicated that the photographers spent most of their time manning guns to ward off attacks by Zeros.

The absence of the photographers from the squadron worked no particular hardship initially since, despite the careful preparation made for the conduct of photographic work prior to leaving the States, the squadron had been able to obtain only two aerial cameras. Even these two cameras were later sent to Guadalcanal on orders of the Commanding General, 1st MAF. However, when the squadron commander was subsequently ordered to establish an air warning and fighter direction center on Espiritu Santos, the photographers were the only personnel available to man it. Their absence on bombardment missions at this time did prove a source of considerable inconvenience. Nevertheless, as late 30 October, 1942, photographers of VMO-251 were still doing a large amount of the aerial photographic work of the 11th Bombardment Group, USAF.

First indication of the impending Guadalcanal operation came in late July when the operation order for the landings was received. In this order VMO-251 was designated a task unit of COMAIRSOPAC and ordered to take over the air defense of Espiritu Santos, as well as assist to the maximum the operations of the Army bombardment units which would be based there.

Following receipt of this order, further orders were received to embark all non-flying personnel and equipment aboard COMAIRSOPAC flagship, the CURTISS, for movement of the squadron to Espiritu Santos. Plans were again made to borrow transportation from the Army and to again move personnel and equipment (less the airplanes, the pilots who would fly them, and nine mechanics) the thirty-five miles from Tontouta to Noumea. The CURTISS would arrange the necessary transportation from the dock to the ship, since the ship was still anchored in the stream. When the time came to initiate embarkation,

two enlarged dug-outs and a baby lighter were available. Trucks were arriving in good order, and on time, and unloading into the lighters, was being expeditiously accomplished. Even with the limited handling facilities aboard the CURTISS, embarkation was proceeding satisfactorily and within the time limits specified, until the tide began to recede. It was then found that the lighters could not approach that portion of the dock assigned VMO-251. The other portion of the dock, being fully utilized, was not available. Trucks piled up and could not be unloaded. In the end, the CURTISS ordered personnel aboard and sailed, leaving fully a third of the squadron equipment and supplies on the docks or in the trucks.

The situation appeared somewhat hopeless, with only fifteen pilots and nine mechanics (all of the squadron personnel remaining) on hand to handle the gear. Fortunately, however, Colonel Edson's Raider Battalion had left behind in Noumea a rear echelon of about eighty Marines. These were called upon to assist; and this they did in a very fine manner. Following a night in which the equipment was left on the dock under an Army MP, the whole of it was moved the next day and placed in a dump near the Raiders' camp.

Since the flight echelon of the squadron could not move north until the ground echelon arrived at Espiritu Santos and establish itself at the field, several days were available before it was necessary for the flight echelon to depart New Caledonia. On next to the last day before the scheduled departure, a vessel strangely familiar by reason of certain airplanes and trucks it carried as deck load arrived at the dock at Noumea. It was the long -- sought-for-and much-cabled-about ship bearing the remainder of the squadron, which had gone direct to New Zealand from the United States. Equipment aboard was generally intact, although the numerous trans-shipments which had followed its departure from San Diego had at times placed severe strains on the security personnel which accompanied it. Aside from the pleasure of seeing old friends again, an even greater joy pervaded VMO-251 pilots when it was ascertained that the vessel was under orders to Espiritu Santos and could take on board the gear which the CURTISS had left behind.

Thus, with further assistance from personnel of the rear echelon of the Raiders, the gear was loaded aboard and the ship sailed, to once more bring the

two component parts of the squadron together. Next day, the flight echelon, accompanied by an Army B-26 carrying the nine mechanics, then flew by way of Efate to Espiritu arriving there about the 10th of August.

When the flight echelon arrived at Espiritu Santos the ground echelon had established itself in camp and had put into operation certain improvised field facilities. Some of its personnel were still engaged in moving the remainder of the supplies and equipment brought up on the CURTISS, while others had already undertaken assistance to the 11th Bombardment Group. This latter consisted of refueling the B-17's which had arrived sometime the first week in August and were then engaged in operations to support the landings to the north. Refueling was being done from drums by means of hand pumps, and men engaged on this task were working from 16 to 20 hours a day.

The servicing of the B-17's was the first of the numerous service jobs VMO-251 would be called upon to perform while it was based at Bomber #1. This was the name by which the field at the immediate south end of Paliukoula Bay on Espiritu Santos would later be called. At the time it was occupied by VMO-251, however, it had no name. It had only shortly before been dug from the coral-based coconut groves, and was the only flying strip on the island. By reason of its position, it was to become one of the busiest fields in the South Pacific. Not only was it to form the base of operations for VMO-251 and a major part of the 11th Bombardment Group for the next two months, but it was also to become during this period the only forward staging point for fighter and dive-bomber aircraft to and from Guadalcanal. It was to this field that most of the carrier aircraft were to come when their parent carriers were sunk or damaged. By reason of the fine harbor for ships in Segundo channel, it was at this field, too, that much of the air freight and passenger business was to be handled. And VMO-251, which was shortly to be assigned the responsibility for this field and had the only assortment of men, material and equipment to perform the many tasks required, was to take almost the entire load of the housekeeping, service, and maintenance details for the next two critical months.

The engineering records of VMO-251 are replete with maintenance work and the provision of spare parts to planes which came to Espiritu with only their flight crews. Army and Navy pilots will remember well standing around waiting for the mess gear to be washed a third time before they could get dinner (or any other meal) at the VMO-251 mess tent. Many of the sick and wounded returning from Guadalcanal or pilots of crashed aircraft on Bomber #1 will remember receiving medical attention at the VMO-251 dispensary. The field itself will undoubtedly show today the earmarks of the direction and assistance given by VMO-251 personnel to the Naval construction detachment which was later put to work on the field making hideaways and revetments, installing permanent fuel facilities, building docks to Paliukoula Bay, and the like.

It is estimated that as high as 144 aircraft, other than the squadron's own, received services and work from VMO-251, while the medical dispensary cared for almost 1000 patients.

While the above services were being rendered, the squadron had other things to do, too. It was charged with the air defense of Espiritu Santos and, lacking suitable early warning or fighter direction facilities, it was called upon to run three combat air patrols of four planes each daily for two to three hours at dawn, at noon, and before dark. At other times, following the establishment of a radar site on Cape Cumberland, sixty airline miles from the airfield, it had to takeoff and fly interceptions. At the same time, pilots needed training badly, and this had to be accomplished. With the limited number of pilots, <sup>available</sup> made consistently worse by depletions caused by ferrying flights and other temporary detachments to Guadalcanal as well as by reason of casualties, flying time was consuming a very large number of squadron man-hours. Even the photographers, it should be remembered, were doing their share with the B-17's.

The setting up of the radar on Cape Cumberland, as well as its subsequent operation, was also a squadron function. Captain Welch and twenty-three enlisted, with considerable equipment, were detached for this purpose, and remained absent until October. (For the story of this expedi-

tion, with the difficulties and hardships that had to be overcome, see Captain Welch's statement on the subject).

Concurrently with the setting up of the radar, VMO-251 was also charged with the establishment of an interceptor command. With the equipment available at that time, some of which was lent by a Cub unit, the best that could be done toward this end was to provide an installation wherein communications could be established with the radar, with the GUESS in Segundo Channel, with certain nearby ground detachments, and with the airfield; where information could be plotted; and from whence it could be disseminated. Communication with the radar could be by radio only, and, over 60 miles of mountainous jungle, this was most difficult. The few wire circuits to adjacent units were not always reliable; and good information on the movements of friendly units was not readily available. To weaken the system still further, there was the lack of trained personnel for plotting. Nevertheless, with all its imperfections, the interceptor command functioned - and fairly effectively on many occasions - although a test with real "bogies" never came. At any rate, this system with its <sup>one</sup> radar was the only warning or fighter direction system Espiritu had until October when, as the Army relieved the Marines, personnel were available to set up another radar - this time at Turtle Bay. On the first of October, the Army also relieved VMO-251 of all interceptor command functions except fighter direction. VMO-251 itself was moving from Bomber #1 to take over the fighter strip just completed at Turtle Bay.

At Turtle Bay the housekeeping, service, and maintenance duties of VMO-251 continued much the same as they had been at Bomber #1, except on a considerably reduced scale. Fewer transient aircraft came into the field at Turtle Bay and these were mostly fighters. The squadron was, therefore, better able to establish itself and to operate towards its own ends than it had been at Bomber #1. A nice camp was set up; field operating facilities were installed and continuously improved; and the squadron assumed the appearance of an integrated unit. Except for the continuous demands on

personnel for duties away from Espiritu Santos the squadron prospects for training looked bright. There were also added indications that at a later date the squadron might be committed to action in the north as a unit.

VMO-251 continued to occupy the fighter strip at Turtle Bay as long as it was on Espiritu Santos. During the latter part of November, however, it was absorbed into MAG 11 when that unit moved into Turtle Bay and assumed command of the field and the units based there.

Throughout the period of VMO-251's stay on Espiritu Santos, the losses made upon its personnel for temporary duties elsewhere proved a constant drain on the squadron's capacity to perform its own duties. Added to these depletions were also the casualties that occurred, which, with no replacements being received, still further weakened the squadron's effectiveness. On several occasions, for example, pilots' strength was so reduced as to make an effective air defense well nigh possible. Due to the very fine group of enlisted men with the squadron and the fact that there never were sufficient officers for the many jobs undertaken, the other duties did not suffer too greatly by these losses.

Some of the movements and other happenings to personnel are given below:

In early August, Major C. H. Hayes, the squadron executive officer, and Lieutenant Rutledge, the squadron construction officer, were ordered to Guadalcanal in charge of one hundred and forty CUB personnel to take over the duties of preparing the field for the receipt and operation of the aircraft of MAG-23, which were due to arrive shortly. Major Hayes and Lt. Rutledge remained on for some time after the first two squadrons arrived to assist in their operation.

In early September, six pilots of VMO-251 were called upon to ferry fighter planes from a carrier to Guadalcanal. Most of the pilots had never been aboard a carrier before, yet the takeoffs and subsequent several hundred mile flight to Guadalcanal were both executed successfully. Lieutenant Railsback, however, suffered a broken arm when the Navy scout bomber in which he was being ferried to the carrier crashed on takeoff at Espiritu.

Another ferry flight of fighters to Guadalcanal followed shortly on the heels of the first, and involved nearly all of the pilots of the squadron. During an alert takeoff shortly after the arrival of this unit, Lieutenant Rutledge (who had been in Guadalcanal with Major Hayes and had since returned) crashed and was seriously injured. He was evacuated to a rear area hospital, and thence to the States.

On 20 September, MSgt Wendell P. Garton was sent to the Fijis to ferry an P4F-7 (photographic plane) back to Espiritu. He was absent from the squadron until about the 11th of October. Shortly thereafter, in attempting to ferry the same plane to Guadalcanal MSgt Garton was forced to land at sea about fifteen miles off the northeast coast of Espiritu, and only by the outstanding work of Major William R. Campbell in a J2F-4 was he rescued. Major Campbell with Lt. Kenneth J. Kirk in the rear seat effected a landing with the J2F in water so rough that even a PBX flying overhead would not attempt to land. After taxiing to the crash, Lt. Kirk went out on one wing and attempted to pull MSgt Garton from the water. In so doing he lost his footing and himself went overboard. Major Campbell, alone in the J2F, then had the task of getting both men out. This he did by taxiing the plane up to the vicinity of where the men clung to the still floating wreckage of the plane which had crashed, letting go the controls and running out on the wing tip himself. After getting both men aboard, Major Campbell had to taxi his plane about ten miles through very rough water before he could find sufficiently smooth water in which to take off.

Shortly after Garton's rescue, he was given another P4F-7 to ferry to Guadalcanal. This time he was more successful, and returned to the squadron a few days after making delivery of the plane. In the meanwhile, Lt. Kirk and Tech. Sgt. Emmett L. Anderson had collided in the air during tactical training. Both had been forced to quit their planes, Lt. Kirk so suddenly that he was never seen by ground or air observers who witnessed the accident. to leave the plane at all. Fortunately, with gashed mouth, broken teeth, and a broken leg, he parachuted to the water near a destroyer and was picked up. Lt. Kirk remained on the sick list until 7 November.

On 20 September, Captain James P. Adams and Marine Gunner Richard E. Gilmore, the assistant engineering officer, were ordered to Guadalcanal to take over duties there with MAG 23. They were lost to the squadron until sometime in November. Still others were being taken away for much needed assistance in Guadalcanal. Tech. Sgt. Peak went up for photographic work. Later Captain Carl Longley was sent up to fly the F4F-7 (a flying gas tank with no armament) in a sky still filled with Jap Zeros. He also remained until sometime in November. Following him fifteen enlisted men were taken from the squadron for duty in Guadalcanal. Another was ordered to duty as radioman on General Geiger's command plane. Tech. Sgt. Garton was again sent to the Fijis for another F4F-7. At about this time also, Lt. Whitten, (one of the officers who was on the U. S. S. ASTORIA when that ship was sunk), likewise being on temporary duty in Guadalcanal, suffered an attack of "bends" while engaged in a combat mission at that place. He was also evacuated to a naval hospital and thence to the States.

Towards the latter part of October, Tech. Sgt. Anderson was ordered to take one of the planes of a depleted Navy unit to Guadalcanal. Shortly after arrival, <sup>there</sup> he did not return from a combat flight. His squadron, having received no information of his presence on Guadalcanal, made inquiries. Only after several weeks were the facts ascertained. Nothing further has been heard of Sgt. Anderson and (it is believed) he is carried as missing in action. Other pilots who ferried planes to Guadalcanal in October and November and who stayed to fight included Major William R. Campbell, Captain Charles P. Weiland, Lieutenant Kenneth J. Kirk, Lts. Robert M. Livingston, Joe H. McIllothin, Jr., Herbert A. Peters, Roy T. Spurlock, Michael R. Yuncik, and Thaddeus P. Wolfcik. Major Campbell, who left in October for an extended tour on Guadalcanal, also saw later service with the squadron following its reorganization as strictly a fighter squadron under Major Renner in December.

The squadron commander from 12 December 1941 until 30 October 1942, was Lieutenant Colonel John N. Hart. On the latter date he was



detached and ordered to duty as First Marine Air Wing liaison officer on the staff of Commander Aircraft South Pacific.

Despite the fact that during the period July through November, 1942, the squadron was actually employed on almost every other mission except observation, even as late as September the 29th information was received from higher authority that the squadron was still primarily an observation squadron and should give priority of training to this work.

But how?