

FIVE

VOL. 17 NO. 13

NAVAL AIR STATION KEY WEST, FLORIDA

Army Hawk air defense soldiers come home to Key West

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With the exception of a visiting Marine or Air Force Squadron or a Coast Guard helicopter refueling, visitors don't see much else but "Navy" on Boca Chica Key. Over 40 years ago they wouldn't have gotten that same impression.

A special ceremony last Friday at the air station's main flag pole reminded passer-bys and duty section personnel that Boca Chica was just as much Army as Navy during the 1960s and 1970s when Army Hawk air defense soldiers were stationed here.

"It's become common practice today that military operations are done jointly," said Naval Air Station (NAS) Key West Commanding Officer Capt. James Scholl to a gathering of 24 Army veterans who once manned Key West's air defense batteries during the most intense days of the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Cold War.

"You, here on Boca Chica, were on the cutting edge of joint warfare development four decades ago," said Scholl.

They stood in four rows wear-



ing now a different uniform, white shirts and khaki pants. Hair was thinned, if not gone, and athletic physiques were eclipsed by years of civilian life. But when the American flag was marched in by NAS Key West's honor guard and the Army hymn was played on

a borrowed sound system from NAS' Ground Electronics, the veterans stood as straight and proud as any service member graduating from recruit training.

"Behind me is a Navy EA-6A aircraft," said Col. Bob Nossov, the senior Army officer in Key West

Naval Air Station (NAS) Key West Commanding Officer Capt. James K. Scholl presents the Korea Defense Service member to former Army Hawk missile soldier Wes Guidry during a special ceremony at NAS Key West May 19. Scholl presented 11 Korea Defense Service Medals to Army veterans who were in Key West as part of a reunion of former Army Hawk missile soldiers who served in Key West during the 1960s and 70s.

U.S. Navy photo by James Brooks

and the director of plans and policy at Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF) South. "To Captain Scholl, it's a Navy jet. To the Army veterans gathered today, it's a target of opportunity."

"Hoo-AH!" shouted the veterans in unison proving that despite the years, they were still very much Army.

The ceremony was the culminating event of a reunion Hawk air defense soldiers hold periodically in Key West. The soldiers arrived in Key West last Wednesday and checked into visitors quarters on Boca Chica Key.

"We tried to get them space in the original barracks where they lived but those rooms were

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EYE ON THE FLEET MEDITERRANEAN



Mediterranean Sea (May 22, 2006) - Inside Flight Deck Control, Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Handler) Airman Kenny Lane monitors audio communications and video cameras to update the position of aircraft on the flight deck aboard the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS Enterprise (CVN 65). Enterprise and embarked Carrier Air Wing One (CVW-1) are currently on a scheduled six-month deployment in support of the Global War on Terrorism.

U.S. Navy photo by PH3 Marcel A. Barbeau

inside:

TAKE A HIKE: Smart vacations that'll make your family feel like



While visiting an abandoned air defense emplacement on the north side of Boca Chica Key, Jeff Barton, former Hawk soldier stationed in Key West during 1977-1978, describes to Naval Air Station Key West Commanding Officer Capt. James Scholl what the original missile battery looked like and how it operated. Approximately 24 former Hawk missile soldiers who once served in Key West returned for a reunion this week and visited their former Hawk missile sites. *U.S. Navy photo by James Brooks*

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already taken,” said Ron Demes, NAS Key West business manager. “Not many people around here know some of the Boca Chica visitors quarters were built with money from the Army budget to house Army soldiers. All signs that the barracks belonged to the Army have long disappeared but these veterans know and are very proud of it.”

Early Thursday morning, the veterans and their wives boarded an MWR bus and toured their former missile sites on Key West and Boca Chica. During the 1960s and 70’s, the Army had four missile sites in the area. Battery “A” was located on Fleming Key on the site that is now home to the Army Special Forces Underwater Operations School. Two others are on either side of Boca Chica Key and the other was at Key West

International Airport. Rusting metal towers, protective berms and abandoned, graffiti-marked buildings are left to either leave people wondering or veterans and old timers remembering of what was once there.

During the ceremony, Nossov presented each veteran the Army Freedom Team Salute. The Army Freedom Team Salute is given by the Secretary of the Army to show appreciation to veterans and others not in uniform for their service and dedication to the country and nation. After the Army award was given, Scholl presented the Korea Defense Medal to 11 of the veterans. The Korea Defense Medal was recently approved by the Department of Defense to be awarded to those who served on the Korean peninsula. Many of the veterans who were stationed in Key West went on to duty stations in Korea and qualified for the campaign medal.

“I was stationed in Key West

just before the Hawk missiles were withdrawn from here,” said Jeff Barton, the youngest of the Hawk veterans attending the reunion. “I wasn’t here very long before the Army sent me to Korea. Trust me, Korea wasn’t anything like Key West. It’s good to be back here and it brings back a lot of great memories.”

“We never had to fire a missile,” said Wes Guidry, reunion organizer who had operated the missile battery’s fire control system. “We had different levels of readiness from 20 minutes to 24 hours. One of the four batteries was always on alert, though. If you ever heard the words “Blazing Skies” over the radio, that meant we had an unidentified aircraft in bound and we had to be ready to engage the target, if necessary. Like us veterans, the HAWK missile has been replaced. It’s good to see old friends and be back in the Keys again.”