

A HISTORY OF MARINE FIGHTER ATTACK SQUADRON 312



HISTORY AND MUSEUMS DIVISION
HEADQUARTERS, U.S. MARINE CORPS
WASHINGTON, D.C.

A Vought F4U-4 Corsair similar to those obtained by VMF-312 in late 1946, and used in combat in Korea. This aircraft has been restored to flying condition and is on display at the United States Marine Corps Aviation Museum at Quantico, Va. (USMC Photo).

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By

Major William J. Sambito, USMC



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FOREWORD

Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 312, the Checkerboard squadron, enjoys a fine reputation among Marine aviators. This volume, one of a new series of brief histories on famous aviation squadrons, is offered as a tribute to the pilots and crewmen who have contributed so significantly to Marine aviation.

The author, Major William J. Sambito, earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology from Colby College, Maine, and is an experienced helicopter pilot who served with HMM-262 and -165 during the Vietnam War. After attending the Armed Forces Staff College, he was assigned in January 1975 to the History and Museums Division.

It is hoped that each of the brief accounts in this series will awaken a new interest in unit history and inspire Marines to retain important materials and record events of historical significance. The Command Chronologies prepared semiannually are excellent vehicles for the accomplishment of this. Important source documents and narrative accounts should be included in them to ensure that the entire story is told.



E. H. SIMMONS

Brigadier General, U. S. Marine Corps (Ret.)
Director of Marine Corps History and Museums

Reviewed and approved:
15 June 1978

PREFACE

The history of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 312 is a narrative account of the famed Checkerboard squadron in action. VMFA-312 saw its first action in the skies over Okinawa during World War II, and later the squadron was used extensively throughout the Korean conflict. The Checkerboards were one of the first Marine squadrons in Vietnam and today maintain their combat proficiency by constant training and hard work. VMFA-312 is a proud squadron with a rich and deep heritage and has passed along its traditions to the pilots and crewmen who presently fly Marine aircraft with the Checkerboard markings.

The text was reviewed and edited by LtCol Gary W. Parker, who was assigned to the History and Museums Division in August 1976. The manuscript was set in type by Miss Cathy Stoll and Lance Corporal Paul Gibson and prepared for publication by the Production Editor, Mr. Douglas Johnston. Most of the photographs used in this monograph are official Department of Defense (Marine Corps) photographs from the History and Museums Division.



WILLIAM J. SAMBITO
Major, U.S. Marine Corps

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A History of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 312

*Organization and Training—Okinawa: Action at Last—Reorganization and More Training—Korea—
New Aircraft and New Alerts—The Vietnam Era and Subsequent Operations*

Organization and Training

Marine Fighting Squadron 312 (VMF-312), Marine Aircraft Group 31 (MAG-31), 3d Marine Aircraft Wing (3d MAW), Fleet Marine Force was commissioned, without ceremonies, at Page Field, Parris Island, South Carolina, on 1 June 1943. The unit had a strength at the time of commissioning of 8 officers and 102 enlisted men under the command of Major Richard M. Day. During the month, additional Marines joined and by the 30th the total squadron complement consisted of 29 officers and 117 enlisted men. Of the officers, 25 were second lieutenants who had been transferred from VMF-311 at Page Field or Headquarters Squadron 31 at Cherry Point, North Carolina. Among those young aviators was a Second Lieutenant Victor A. Armstrong who later rose to general officer rank.

Initially, the squadron received 10 North American SNJ-4 Texans and one Chance Vought F4U-1D Corsair. The Texan scout trainer with tandem cockpits was equipped with one .30 caliber machinegun in the fuselage forward of the pilot, one in the right wing, and a third on a flexible mount in the rear cockpit. Powered by a 550-horsepower engine, the SNJ-4 had a maximum speed of 205 miles per hour at 5,000 feet.¹

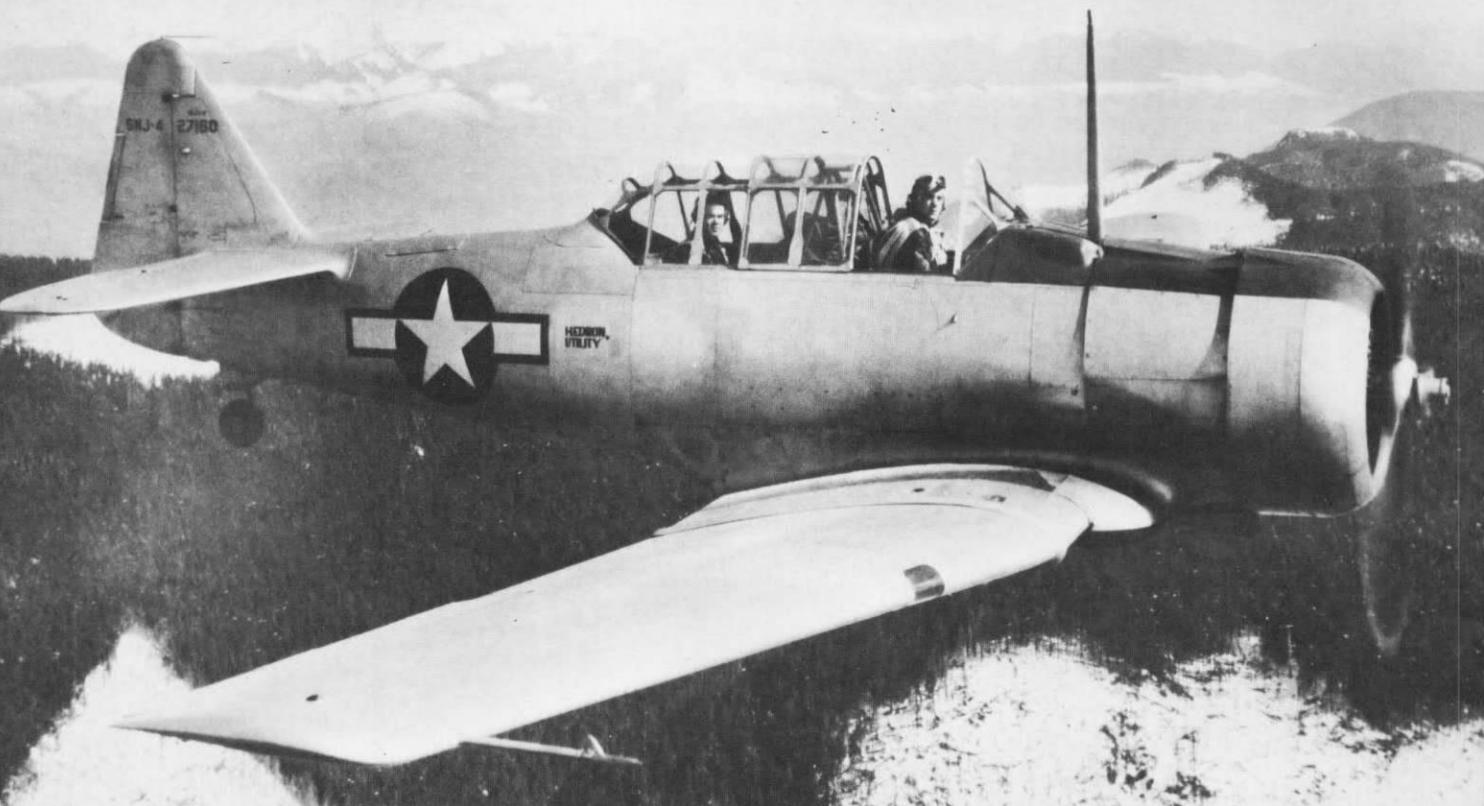
By the end of August, VMF-312 had 11 F4U-1Ds and one SNJ-4. The Corsair, with its 2,000-horsepower engine, had a top speed of 417 miles per hour at 20,000 feet and a service ceiling of 35,000 feet. The single-seat F4U was armed with six .50 caliber machineguns, twin bomb racks, and attachments for eight air-to-ground rockets.²

The squadron members selected as their unit crest a sinister Satan-like bulldog wearing a flying helmet and carrying six .50 caliber machineguns. Master

Technical Sergeant James R. Wroble was credited with the design of the insignia. In honor of the commanding officer, the men nicknamed the squadron "Day's Knights." Black and white checkerboard bands, unrelated to the nickname or the insignia, soon appeared on the cowling and rudders of the unit's aircraft. Although the originators of this trademark are unknown, the checkerboard became a lasting design of this famous squadron.

The urgency of the war necessitated the immediate incorporation of a combat-training syllabus. The program consisted of a familiarization phase, gunnery, individual combat maneuvers, and flight tactics. Maintaining aircraft availability to meet the flight schedule was no easy task. The engineering section was understrength, and the Corsair was new to the Marine Corps. Experienced mechanics were scarce, but under the supervision of engineering and line chiefs, the men rapidly developed their skills. The small ordnance department had very little practical experience, but soon mastered the difficult job of boresighting the Corsair's guns.

During the intense training which continued until the end of 1943, operational accidents killed four squadron Marines and injured another. On 29 July 1943, Second Lieutenant Henry B. Roberson and Private First Class Gerard D. Bennett were killed when their Texan crashed during a routine flight. Second Lieutenants Troy Mullinnix and William F. Ericson were killed in F4U mishaps on 1 and 6 October, respectively. On 5 October Second Lieutenant Buell T. Reynolds was injured when his Corsair struck a buzzard. Pieces of the canopy injured the pilot's eyes, and he had to bail out.



USMC Photo A700138

The first aircraft received by VMF-312 were North American SNJ-4 Texans similar to the one shown here. When VMF-312 was commissioned on 1 June 1943, it received 10 Texans and 1 Chance Vought F4U-1D Corsair.

Although his F4U was lost, Lieutenant Reynolds escaped further injury.

On 2 January 1944, the squadron, less 17 pilots, departed Parris Island by train for California, arriving at Marine Corps Air Depot, Miramar, San Diego on 9 January. The flight echelon left South Carolina with 17 Corsairs on 5 January arriving at Naval Air Station (NAS), North Island, San Diego three days later. Seven weeks were spent on the west coast preparing for movement to the Pacific combat area. All pilots were given refresher training in recognition, survival data, and chemical warfare, and all requalified with the M-1 rifle. In addition to rifle requalification, the squadron took part in daily combat conditioning.

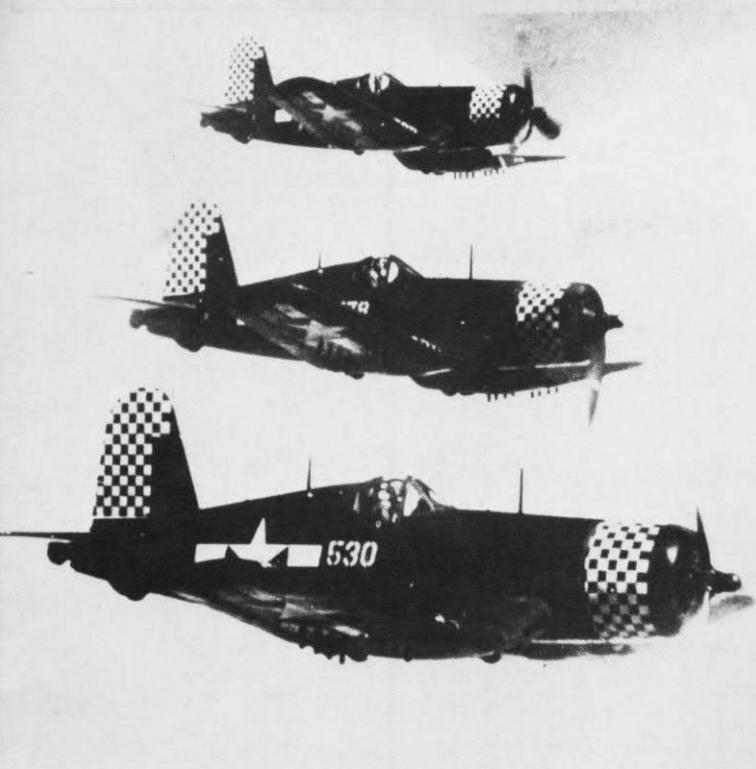
On 28 February, VMF-312 embarked on board the carrier USS *Hornet* (CV 12) at San Diego and sailed the following day. The *Hornet* arrived at Pearl Harbor on 4 March and "Day's Knights" proceeded to Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS), Ewa where the squadron was assigned to MAG-32, Marine Aircraft, Hawaiian Area. The primary mission while at Ewa was to train pilots and ground personnel for combat in the Pacific. At the same time the squadron was to be prepared to defend the Hawaiian Islands under the operational control of the Hawaiian Sea

Frontier and the Seventh Army Air Force Fighter Command.

The squadron remained at Ewa until June 1944. During that time aircraft accidents took a heavy toll. On 28 April, Second Lieutenant Hugh L. Marsh was seriously injured and his F4U destroyed when he swerved off the runway while landing. On 19 May, in two separate mishaps, Second Lieutenant George A. Hartig was killed and Second Lieutenant Raymond H. Schannamann had to bail out of his plane when he was unable to recover from a flat spin. On 8 June, Captain Frank A. Beavers Jr., and Second Lieutenant Robert J. Devine were killed when their planes collided.

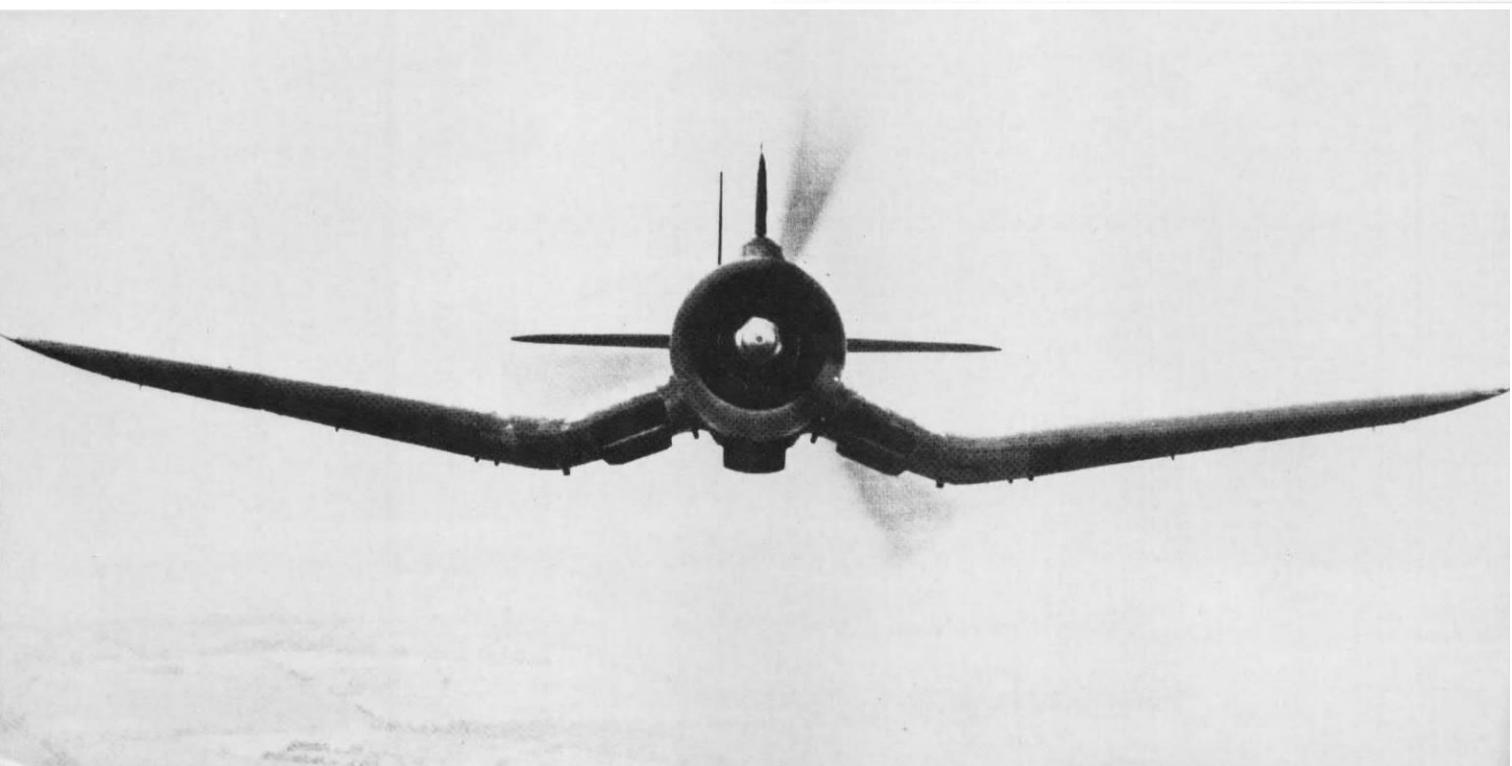
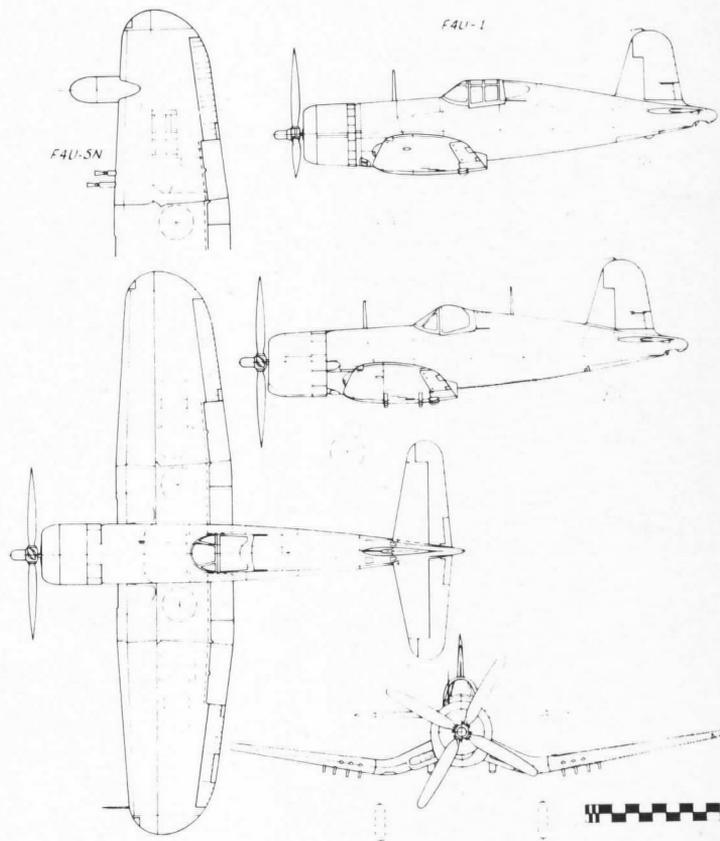
On 25 June 1944, VMF-312 boarded the escort carrier USS *Nassau* (CVE 16) and began the voyage to Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides, arriving on 8 July. The unit was assigned to MAG-11, 2d MAW located at Turtle Bay airstrip. Here the squadron received 24 Goodyear FG-1 Corsairs.*

*Because the demand for the Chance Vought Corsair exceeded the company's production capability, two other manufacturers, Goodyear and Brewster, were subcontracted to build the Corsair. The Goodyear version was designated the FG-1 and the Brewster model was designated the F3A-1.



USMC Photo

VMF-312's Checkerboard Corsairs operating from Okinawa's Kadena Airfield, April 1945 (Above). The Chance Vought Corsair's inverted gull wing (visible in photograph below and line drawing, right) was its hallmark. The sound of the wind passing through the wing root inlets prompted the Japanese to dub it "Whistling Death."



Since the planes had been preserved for delivery, they required not only servicing but also flight testing.* On one of those flights, First Lieutenant Harry L. Burge failed to return; his body was later found washed up on shore. By 31 August, the FG-1s had all been tested and both the planes and the pilots were ready for combat.

The frustration of waiting for a combat assignment appeared to be at an end when on 22 September the squadron was ordered to move to Ulithi Atoll in the Carolines. The ground echelon sailed immediately and on the 10th of October landed at Ulithi and began preparing the area for the arrival of MAG-11 aircraft. The order for VMF-312 to move to Ulithi was unexplainedly cancelled.

The flight echelon, meanwhile, had left Espiritu Santo on 7 October and, after a stop on Guadalcanal, moved to Ponam Island in the Admiralties. There alerted for island defense, "Day's Knights" flew combat air patrol (CAP) and escorted naval transports en route to the Solomons.

A third detachment, the rear echelon, had remained at Espiritu Santo. This detachment, originally scheduled to join the rest of the squadron at a later date, began accepting 24 new F4U-1Ds on 15 October. Finally in early December, the squadron, disappointed, reassembled at Luganville Airfield on Espiritu Santo.

The first task for the unit on return to Espiritu Santo was to install rocket launchers on their new F4Us. The pilots practiced first with 3.5-inch rockets and then switched to 5-inch rockets, using several barges anchored at sea as targets. On 15 December the pilots received excellent close air support experience while participating in training exercises with the U. S. Army's 105th Infantry Regiment, 27th Division.

By the turn of the year, VMF-312 consisted of 38 pilots, 11 ground officers, a medical officer, 248 enlisted Marines, and 8 Navy Corpsmen and had accumulated 14,538 flight hours. The squadron had yet to meet the enemy, but accidents continued to take their toll. On 15 January, Second Lieutenant John C. Webb experienced aircraft difficulties and bailed out safely. The next day First Lieutenant

Thomas A. Mulligan, practicing bombing and strafing, apparently misjudged the height of the trees around the target, and his Corsair struck the jungle growth and crashed, killing the pilot.

Okinawa: Action at Last

Finally, in March 1945, word was received that the squadron would be moving to Okinawa. The waiting was over. The ground element embarked on an LST and the flight echelon boarded the escort carrier USS *Hollandia* (CVE 97). On 6 April, the LST arrived at Okinawa and the men went ashore and began setting up shop at the newly captured but badly damaged Kadena airstrip. Three days later, the flight echelon flew off the *Hollandia* and became the first fighter squadron to arrive at Kadena. On 12 April 1945, VMF-312, now assigned to MAG-33, 2d MAW, had its first contact with the enemy. While flying CAP, a flight of four Corsairs, led by Captain Dan H. Johnson, intercepted 20 Japanese Zeros and four Jills.^{***} The flight blasted eight Zeros from the sky and damaged six others without a single Corsair loss. The rest of the enemy formation fled north without having reached its objective.

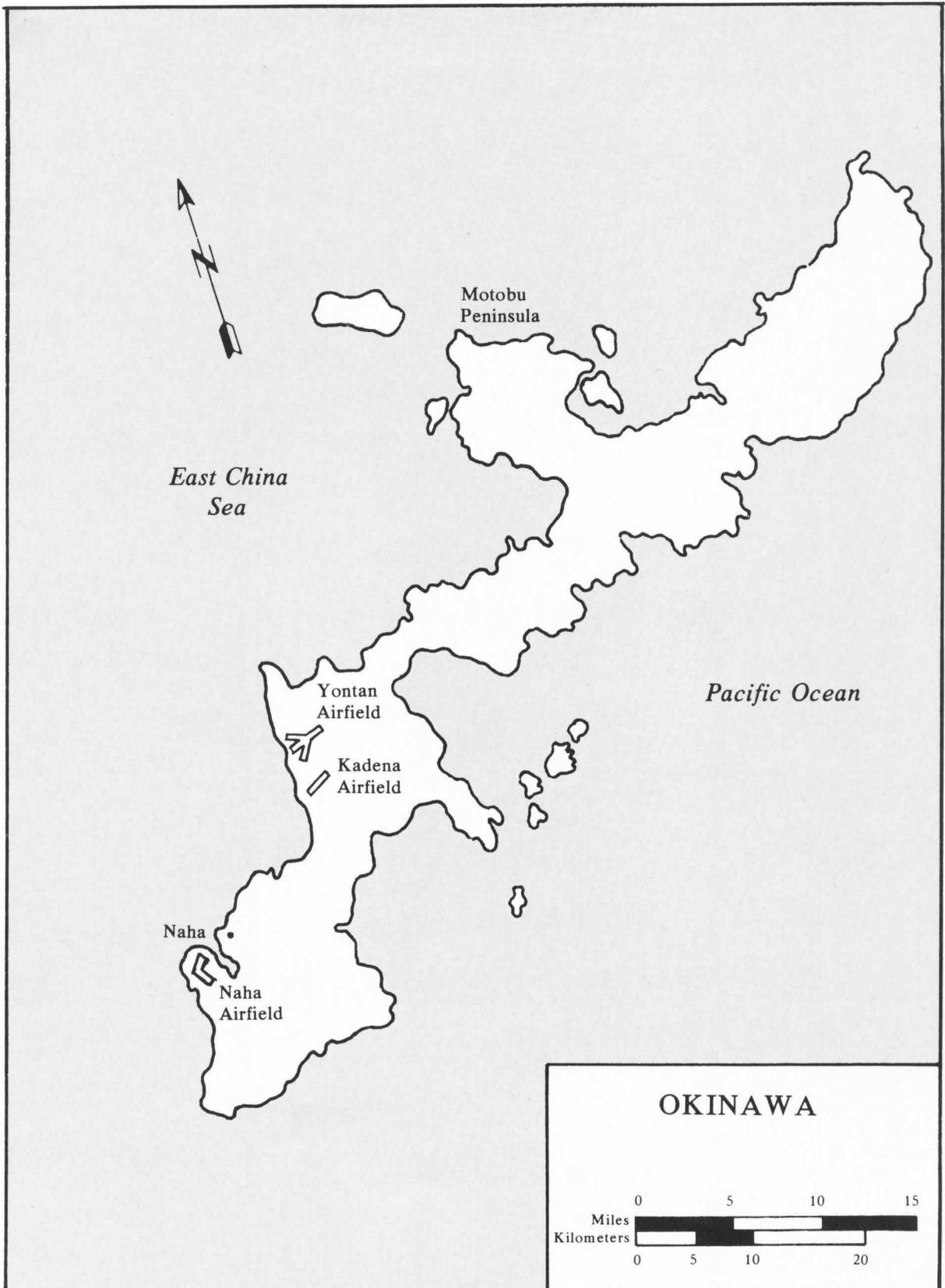
Marine air flying out of Yontan and Kadena airstrips, plus those on board the carriers USS *Bennington* (CV 20) and the USS *Bunker Hill* (CV 17), repeatedly met the attacking Japanese aircraft during the remainder of the month. By the end of April, "Day's Knights" had shot down 17 enemy planes. The only squadron loss during this period was one F4U, piloted by Captain Kenneth L. Reusser, shot down by antiaircraft fire while VMF-312 and -323 were attacking ground targets south of Naha, Okinawa. Captain Reusser successfully ditched off the west coast of the island and was rescued by a destroyer.

The good fortune on losses did not continue for long. On 6 May enemy antiaircraft fire killed Second Lieutenant Fred G. Skrederstu, Jr., the same day First Lieutenant George S. Karl died while attempting to ditch after his plane developed engine trouble. In a third mishap, Second Lieutenant Howard Ferguson, Jr., was forced to ditch but a nearby ship rescued him.

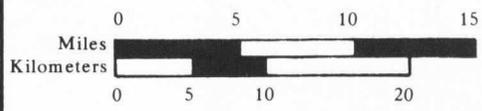
Four days later, one of the most unique fighter interceptions of the war took place. First Lieutenant

*A rubbery-like substance was usually sprayed over aircraft when they are put in storage or transported long distances. This substance completely covered the aircraft like a "cocoon" and helped prevent corrosion. After this "cocoon" was removed the aircraft had to be flight tested before being used operationally.

^{***}The Zero (or Zeke) was a single-engined Mitsubishi fighter. The Jill was a single-engined, torpedo-equipped attack aircraft.



OKINAWA



Robert R. Klingman and Captain Reusser teamed up to destroy a Nick.* The two pilots spotted the enemy fighter and immediately fired most of their ammunition to lighten the F4Us.** Diving from above, with Captain Reusser leading, they maneuvered into position on the tail of the Nick. Captain Reusser fired the rest of his .50 caliber rounds, damaging a wing and one engine. Lieutenant Klingman then moved in for the kill. His guns failed to fire, but the Nick was losing airspeed and the propeller of Klingman's Corsair chewed into the tail of the Japanese plane almost severing the rudder. Klingman made a second pass cutting the rudder completely off and damaging the right stabilizer. A third pass severed the stabilizer and the Nick went down. Although the lieutenant's Corsair was badly damaged, Klingman managed to land safely at Kadena.⁴ Two days after this amazing episode fate almost turned for Lieutenant Klingman. He was forced to bail out when his plane developed hydraulic problems, but he was picked up, uninjured, by a destroyer.

On 14 May 1945, Major Richard M. Day was killed, one of 23 Marine squadron commanding officers to die in action during the war in the Pacific. While flying at 10,000 feet, Major Day's flight was bracketed by anti-aircraft fire. His plane was seen to go into a dive as shells exploded around it; moments later the Corsair was a ball of fire. Ten days later, Major J. Frank Cole assumed command of the unit.

May 25th was a field day for the VMF-312 pilots who destroyed 16 enemy planes, but another squadron pilot was killed in action. Second Lieutenant Malcolm M. Birney was shot down by a Zero, after he had destroyed one of the attacking fighters.

Good hunting continued during June and by the end of the month the squadron's total score was 59 1/2 enemy aircraft destroyed, four probables, and seven damaged. On 10 June the squadron joined with VMF-323 to make the first land-based fighter sweep over the Japanese home islands. The 32-plane strike destroyed 14 aircraft on the ground and caused considerable damage to other aircraft and facilities on the enemy airfields of southern Kyushu Island.

Just two days later, VMF-312 returned to the

same airfields and attacked with 24 Corsairs. This time the rockets and bombs of the F4Us were answered by enemy anti-aircraft guns and one of the pilots, Second Lieutenant Merlin E. O'Neal, was wounded and his plane badly shot up. When the flight reached Kadena, Lieutenant O'Neal bailed out but when a rescue party reached him he was dead.

On 1 July 1945, First Lieutenant Samuel S. Smith was forced to bail out after losing his engine oil. After two months of captivity and torture, he was released. The last VMF-312 pilot to be killed in the war was Captain Paul H. Brown, Jr., who was flying over Japan on 12 July, when his plane was hit by anti-aircraft fire and exploded.

Reorganization and More Training

With the cessation of hostilities, combat air patrol and observation missions kept the MAG-33 units busy until 4 February 1946 when the move back to the United States began. The aircraft were flown to Guam by way of Iwo Jima where they were loaded on board the escort carrier USS *Cape Gloucester* (CVE 109) on which the remainder of the squadron was embarked. On 28 February 1946, the carrier arrived at San Diego.

Throughout the first week in March, the Corsairs were ferried to MCAS, El Toro and by 15 March the entire squadron was assembled at its new base. Lieutenant Colonel Perry L. Shuman, an ace with six kills to his credit, was the new commanding officer. The squadron was assigned to MAG-33, Marine Aircraft, West Coast.

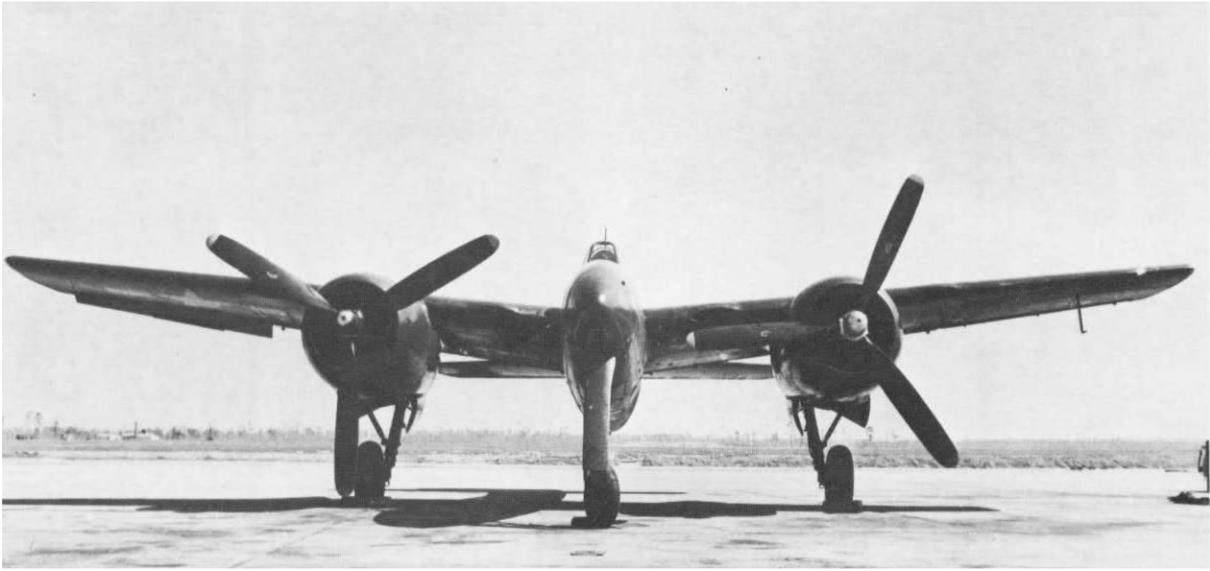
The first task facing the unit was to turn in its F4U-1Ds for 24 new Grumman F7F-3 Tigercats. The basic F7F was primarily a night fighter and the cockpit was configured for a pilot and a radar operator. VMF-312's F7F-3s, however, were a single-seat day fighter version which carried an extra fuel tank in place of the radar operator.

The F7F-3 was a twin-engine plane with a maximum speed of 427 miles per hour at 19,000 feet and a range of 1,600 miles. Its armament consisted of four 20mm cannon in the nose, and the aircraft could carry 4,000 pounds of bombs or two 22-inch torpedoes. Although it was fast, it was not nearly as maneuverable as the single-engine fighters.⁵

During the summer and fall of 1946, the squadron practiced tactics, checked out new pilots, and participated in the numerous air shows held at Navy and Marine Corps bases throughout southern California. In October the distinction of being the only Marine

*The Nick was a Kawasaki two-engine fighter.

**In order for Reusser and Klingman to climb to 38,000 feet, the altitude of the Nick, they had to lighten their aircraft by expending most of their .50 caliber ammunition.



USMC Photo 529995

The sleek lines of the Grumman F7F Tigercat are revealed in this head-on photograph. The model flown briefly by VMF-312 in 1946 was the single-seat, day fighter version.

day fighter squadron equipped with the F7F-3 came to an end. By the end of the month, the last of the Tigercats were flown to storage and new Vought F4U-4 Corsairs were flown in as replacements.

Although similar in appearance to the F4U-1s, many internal changes made the Corsair-4 model a higher performance aircraft. The main features were the incorporation of a larger 2,400-horsepower supercharged engine and a four-bladed propeller which boosted the Corsair's performance to 446 miles per hour at 26,000 feet, a service ceiling of 41,500 feet, and a range of 1,600 miles.

In October 1947, two changes in organizational designations occurred which affected the squadron. First, the VMF designation was changed from Marine Fighting Squadron to Marine Fighter Squadron; and secondly, the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing became its parent organization.

For the next two years, VMF-312 remained with MAG-33 at El Toro. Training exercises in support of the Marines at Camp Pendleton, gunnery at NAS, El Centro, California, and routine training at El Toro kept the unit busy. In July 1950, VMF-312 was reassigned to MAG-12, 1st MAW at El Toro. The following month MAG-12, which also included VMF-212, VMF(N)-542, and VMF(N)-513, was alerted for deployment to the Far East and service in the Korean War.

Korea

After joining 29 officers and 91 enlisted men from organized reserve units in Oakland, Minneapolis, Los Angeles, Dallas, and St. Louis, the squadron consisted of 60 officers and 227 enlisted men. Under the leadership of Major J. Frank Cole, commanding the Checkerboards for the second time, VMF-312 moved to Japan in three increments. The advance party, on board the attack cargo ship USS *Oglethorpe* (AKA 100), left California on 14 August 1950. Three days later, a second group left on board the transport USS *General Weigel* (AP 119), while the main body and 24 F4U-4s boarded the transport carrier USS *Sitkoh Bay* (TCVE 86) and left San Diego on the 24th. Between 16 and 18 September VMF-312 was reunited at Itami Air Force Base in Japan.

Shortly after VMF-312 arrived at Itami, the Marines in Korea in their drive to Seoul sent out an urgent request for close air support. Two aircraft from VMF-312 landed at Kimpo airfield, later to be designated K-14, on 19 September and got into action the following day.

On 28 September, the remainder of the squadron moved to Kimpo airfield where missions were assigned by both the Fifth Air Force and the 1st MAW. The same day, a Checkerboard plane was lost. First Lieutenant Robert R. Rosellen had just



USMC Photo A-4452

VMF-312, its "Checkerboards" plainly visible on its F4Us, at Wonsan airfield in November 1950.

taken off from Itami when his Corsair developed a fuel leak and the cockpit filled with smoke. Lieutenant Rosellen bailed out about five miles off the Japanese coast where he was picked up uninjured by a local fishing boat.

On 14 October MAG-12 moved to Wonsan, Korea, well ahead of the amphibious force that had been scheduled to take this Korean east coast city. When the amphibious assault was delayed by the presence of Russian-made mines in the harbor, the port and surrounding area were taken by Republic of Korea (ROK) forces from the land. The 1st Marine Division landed administratively on 26 October and found the Checkerboards already operating from Wonsan airfield.⁶

VMF-312 accomplished its move in one day and even managed to fly 12 combat sorties. During the month, VMF-312 supported the U. S. Army's 1st Cavalry and 7th and 24th Infantry Divisions, the 1st Marine Division, and ROK units. In addition to close air support missions, the squadron flew leaflet drops, transport escort, and strikes against enemy lines of communication. The pilots did not encounter enemy aerial opposition, but antiaircraft and small arms fire damaged six of the F4Us and two pilots were killed, First Lieutenant Robert O. Crocker on 3 October, and on the 27th, Technical Sergeant Matthew J. Biedka.

November was a busy month for VMF-312. Flights were launched daily, despite bad weather and a shortage of fuel. Close air support missions were flown for the 7th Marines advancing to the Chosin Reservoir and for U. S. Army operations to the northwest. As November ended, the Communists launched a strong counterattack which led to the encirclement of the 1st Marine Division near Chosin. During the month the unit accumulated 1,952 flight hours, but one pilot, Master Sergeant Boyd T. Teague, was killed and four aircraft were lost.

On 1 December the squadron moved north to Yonpo Air Base at Hamhung where the Checkerboards continued to support the Marines at Chosin. On 14 December the squadron moved again; this time back to Itami. There, the 47 officers and 210 enlisted Marines continued daily combat operations against Korean targets.

During the first half of January 1951, the squadron was confronted with the problem of whether it would return to Korea and operate from a land base or go on board a carrier. Consequently, field carrier landing practice (FCLP) was conducted with the regularly scheduled missions. On 19-20 January the pilots qualified on board the USS *Sicily* (CVE 118), but instead of going on board a carrier, the squadron was moved to Bofu Air Base in southern Honshu, Japan.

Until 10 February the pilots flew their way through rain squalls and fog to reach targets in Korea; then the squadron was moved again, this time to Pusan (K-1) in Korea. After two months of operations without losing a pilot, three combat losses and one operational accident killed four pilots. In February Major Daniel H. Davis and First Lieutenants Lawrence H. Simmon and Thomas J. Cochran were killed in action, while First Lieutenant Joseph O. Stonelake died in a landing accident at Pusan.

The squadron remained at K-1 until 5 March when it moved to Sasebo, Japan and boarded the light carrier USS *Bataan* (CVL 29). While still administratively under the control of MAG-12, the squadron was now operationally under the control of the *Bataan* and the Seventh Fleet (Task Force 95). The primary mission assigned the squadron was to escort friendly ships and to blockade enemy craft on the west coast of Korea. Additionally, the unit was assigned the mission of providing armed reconnaissance of the area between Kaesong and Chinampo. Although the area was not considered to be

particularly good for targets, almost every flight launched from the ship found either enemy personnel, trucks, gun emplacements, supplies, or transportation targets. Close air support missions covered the western half of Korea and supported both U. S. Army and Marine ground forces. Four more aircraft were destroyed during March, but no pilots were lost.

April was a notable month for VMF-312 in many ways. More targets were hit, more combat hours were flown, and more anti-aircraft fire was received than in any previous month. The squadron also lost its second commanding officer due to enemy action. A message from USS *Bataan* to 1st MAW describes that loss:

Major Donald P. Frame was killed in action on 4 April 1951. His aircraft was struck by AA fire causing a fire in the cockpit. Major Frame had difficulty in bailing out. Chute opened immediately causing him to strike tail of aircraft. Chute eventually opened and made a normal descent. He made no movement after landing and was picked up by a helicopter after an hour's interval. Major Frame died in the helicopter en route to Seoul.

Major Frank H. Presley assumed command of the squadron until 23 June when Major Edward J. McGee took over the reins of VMF-312.

On 21 April Captain Phillip C. DeLong, a World War II ace with 11 kills, and First Lieutenant Harold D. Daigh were jumped by four Communist propeller-driven YAK fighters near Chinnampo. The Corsair

pilots outmaneuvered the enemy and Lieutenant Daigh quickly knocked one of the YAKs down with a burst from his .50 caliber guns. Captain DeLong then shot down two more while Lieutenant Daigh damaged the remaining one as it made a run for safer skies to the north.

Unfortunately, the month did not end on a note of victory. The following day Captain William J. Rainalter was killed when his plane was hit by anti-aircraft fire, burst into flames, and crashed.

Throughout May the squadron continued operations from the *Bataan* with only one pilot loss. On the 28th First Lieutenant Austin E. Brenneman's plane was hit amidship by an exploding shell.

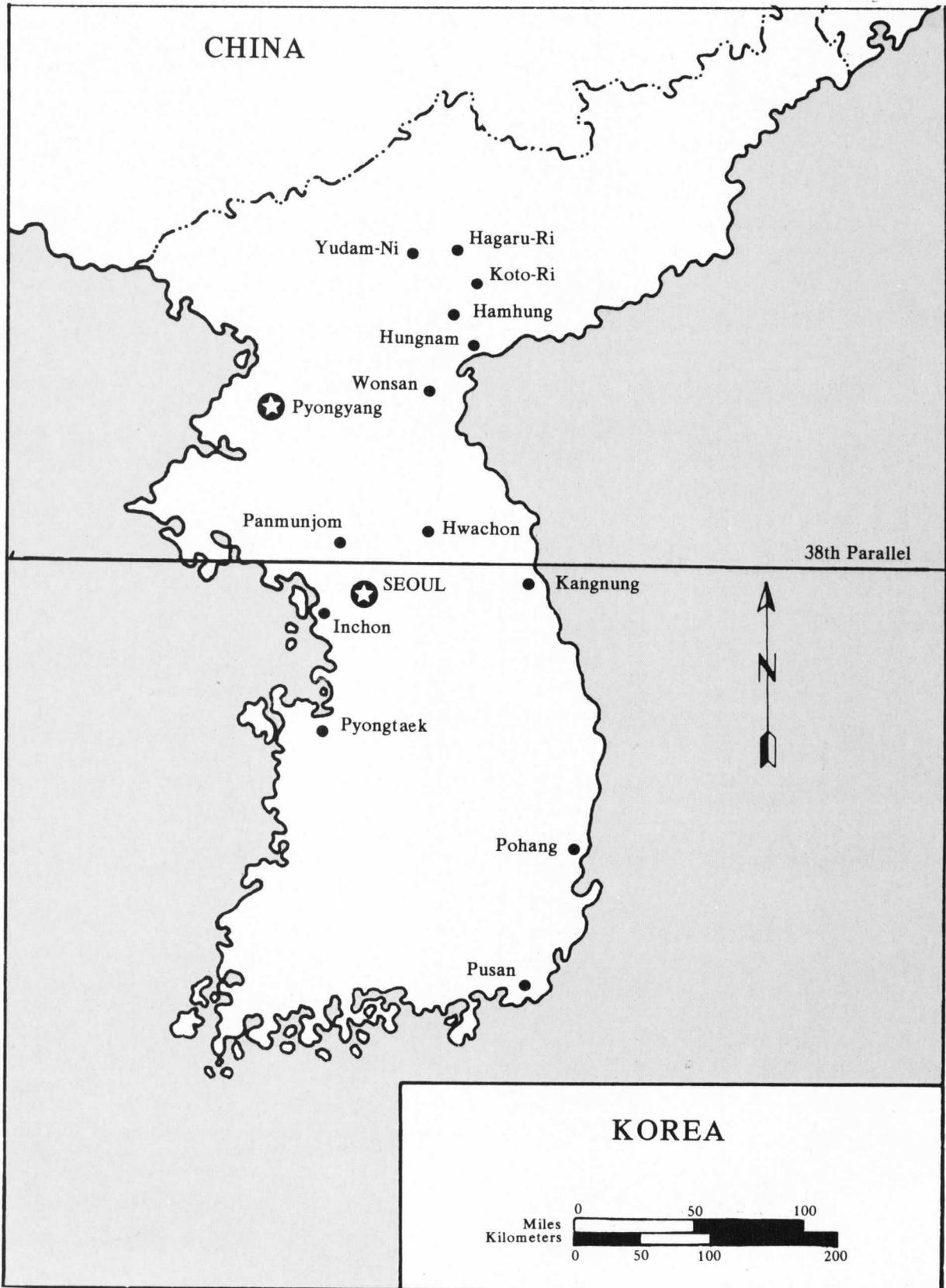
On 6 June 1951, the squadron left the ship at Itami after three months of impressive combat operations. Of a total of 4,945 flight hours and 1,920 carrier landings there were only two minor mishaps. All pilots who had embarked with the squadron in August 1950 were relieved and returned to the United States; a majority had more than 100 missions, Major DeLong leading with 127.

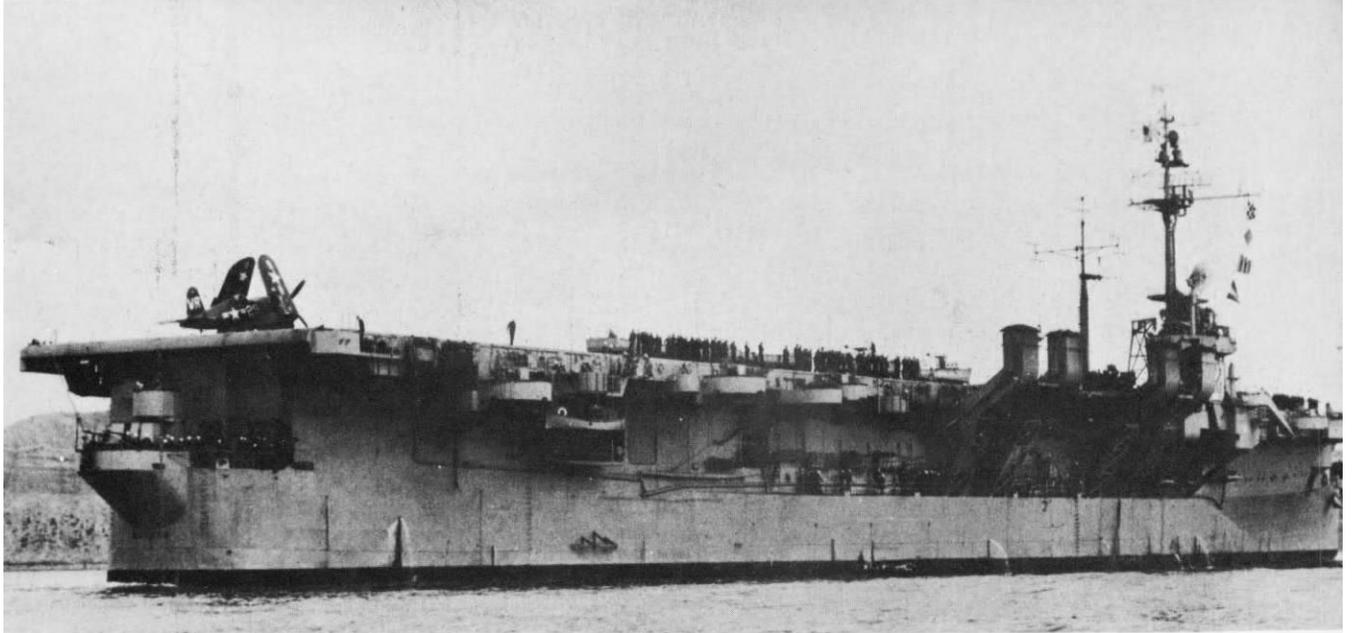
During the four days at Itami, the VMF-312 F4U-4s were swapped for the 20mm-equipped F4U-4Bs of the *Bataan*-bound VMF-323. The reasons for the exchange were that the 20mm cannon were more difficult to load, especially on a crowded carrier deck, and since the ammunition was explosive, it had to be



USMC Photo

A Vought F4U-4 Corsair similar to those obtained by VMF-312 in late 1946, and used in combat in Korea.





USMC Photo 1046208

USS Bataan (CVL 29) was a frequent home for the squadron.

kept in a special locker while the .50 caliber rounds could be stored in ready lockers below decks.

On 11 June, it was back to K-1 for the Checkerboards. While armed reconnaissance and special strike missions were flown from K-1, a detachment of aircraft was sent to K-46 at Hwachon to provide a close air support capability for infantry units on an "on call" basis. While squadron performance during June and July was superb, heavy losses marred the feeling of accomplishment.

On 16 June, First Lieutenant Franklyn H. Stratton's aircraft was hit by small arms fire during a close air support mission. Members of the flight saw him bail out, but upon hitting the ground he lay motionless and was soon surrounded by enemy soldiers. Initially, Lieutenant Stratton was listed as missing in action, but his status was later changed to killed in action. On 3 July 1951, while leading a four-plane flight on an armed reconnaissance mission, Captain James V. Wilkins bailed out after his plane was hit by antiaircraft fire. The pilot was quickly captured and remained a prisoner of war until 5 September 1953. The squadron operated without another mishap until 30 July when an antiaircraft burst hit the right wing of First Lieutenant Harold Hintz's plane. In the erratic weave that followed, his Corsair collided with that of the lead pilot, Lieutenant Colonel Harry W. Reed. Both aircraft went out of control. Lieutenant Hintz managed to bail out. Lieutenant Colonel Reed was killed in the crash and Lieutenant Hintz was captured. On 18 November 1951, Lieutenant Hintz died in captivity.

The majority of the squadron's missions during August and September were directed toward cutting road and rail lines, destroying supply areas, and

slowing the enemy's flow of supplies to the front. During August a large number of new pilots reported in and many of the veterans were transferred for duty with the 1st Marine Division or to staff jobs with MAG-12. On 3 September the Checkerboards were deployed to K-18 at Kangnung, Korea where close air support for frontline forces was added to the squadron's tasks. With both VMF-312 and -214 operating from K-18, it was found that fuel and ordnance on hand were not sufficient to support operations. By 10 September this problem was remedied, but then the extreme dust conditions at K-18 caused additional problems. In spite of maintenance problems, the squadron flew 1,508 hours in September.

During that two-month period, Captain Gerald Fink was shot down and captured on 12 August and Captain James A. Stevenson was killed when his plane was downed by antiaircraft fire on 14 September. Captain Fink remained a prisoner of war until 5 September 1953.

Through January 1952, although the United Nations and the Communist representatives were engaged in peace talks at Panmunjom, the enemy continued his attacks, increased the number of antiaircraft positions, and sent his MIG-15s further from the sanctity of the Chinese border. In response, the VMF-312 engineering department maintained a better than 90 percent aircraft availability rate and the pilots averaged 767 sorties and 1,500 flight hours a month. Increased flight hours resulted in more losses. On 16 October, while on a rail cutting-mission, three Corsairs in a 12-plane flight were downed by ground fire. One pilot, Captain Austin J. Bailey, Jr., luckily made it to the coast where he was

able to make a successful ditching. A rescue aircraft soon had the pilot on his way back to K-18. The other two pilots, First Lieutenant Ralph H. Thomas, Jr., and Second Lieutenant Carl R. Lundquist, went down with their planes and were killed.

VMF-312 lost only one pilot during the month of November, and this was due to enemy action. The single loss came on 4 November when Major James H. Crutchfield's Corsair was hit while attacking a bridge. The pilot was killed when he tried to land in a stream bed.

The following month three aircraft were destroyed and Sergeant Donald Bartoli was killed when a crippled Navy Douglas AD-4 Skyraider crashed into the Checkerboard flight line. Four other Marines working on the F4Us were injured, but none seriously.

Any hopes of 1952 being a year free from pilot losses were quickly destroyed on 1 January. Captain Robert W. Gilardi's craft was hit and caught fire. Before he managed to bail out, Captain Gilardi suffered severe burns which contributed to his capture and death shortly thereafter. Sixteen days later, Captain Walter A. Chinin, Jr., was killed. A burst of anti-aircraft fire sent his plane into a violent spin; Chinin never pulled out.

The end of January brought a change in location for VMF-312. On the 26th, the squadron began moving from K-18 to Itami and immediately began FCLPs in preparation for shipboard duty. Unfortunately, the noncombat environment did not eliminate pilot deaths. On 28 January, 1952, Captain Joseph E. Blattman was killed when his plane apparently stalled in the FCLP pattern and crashed.

By 11 February, 50 officers, 186 enlisted men, and 22 F4U-4s, which were acquired from VMF-212 for 22 F4U-4Bs, were on board the carrier USS *Bairoko* (CVE 11). On 17 February the squadron began operations from the *Bairoko*. On 25 February, while the mission capability remained the same as in the past, the unit's designation was changed to Marine Attack Squadron (VMA) 312. During this cruise, which ended on 20 April 1952, squadron losses decreased considerably. Only six aircraft were destroyed, and the only death occurred on 5 March when Captain Kenneth L. Dodson's Corsair crashed and burned after being hit by anti-aircraft fire.

The end of the cruise with the *Bairoko* did not mean the end of sea duty for the Checkerboards. On 21 April, the squadron moved directly to the *Bataan* where it remained until 21 July 1952. In the three

months with the *Bataan*, VMA-12 lost 13 planes, eight of them to enemy action. The only death came on 15 July when First Lieutenant Guy A. McLaury's F4U-4 crashed on takeoff from K-6 en route to the carrier.

Upon departing the *Bataan*, the squadron relocated to Pyongtaek (K-6). Until the end of August, operations continued with the only interruption being a carrier qualification period again on board the *Sicily* for newly joined aviators. Three Corsairs were lost during the month, but no pilots were lost.

The squadron's land-based activities ended on 4 September 1952 as the unit moved on board the *Sicily*. The most spectacular combat operation during September was the destruction of a Communist MIG-15 jet fighter by a Corsair. On 10 September, Captains Jesse G. Folmar and Walter E. Daniels were attacked by eight MIG-15s which made repeated firing runs on the slower F4Us as they tried to get out of the area. After one of the MIGs completed a run on the Corsairs, instead of breaking off to the side, the jet pulled up directly in front of Captain Folmar's guns. A quick burst of the 20mm cannon soon had the MIG ablaze and heading for the ground. The kill marked the first time an American had downed a jet fighter with a propeller-driven aircraft. Another MIG retaliated with a burst of 37mm fire which forced Captain Folmar to bail out, but he was rescued and returned to the ship. Captain Daniels' plane was not hit and safely landed on board the carrier.

On 19 October, the *Sicily* was relieved on station, and the USS *Badoeng Strait* (CVE 116) became the new home for the Checkerboards. While attached to the *Badoeng Strait*, the squadron attacked enemy small craft operating in the rivers and sanctuaries of North Korea as well as numerous enemy installations ashore. Ground fire and operational accidents continued to plague the squadron. On 27 November, Major Raymond J. Rightmyer, Jr., was killed in a landing accident at an emergency field. Exactly 30 days later, First Lieutenant John B. Goery's F4U was damaged by anti-aircraft fire. Although he bailed out successfully, he was lost at sea.

On 9 February 1953, the squadron moved back to the *Bataan*. The unit now had 34 officers, 170 enlisted men, and a mix of 13 F4U-4s and 11 F4U-4Bs. Continuing the blockade and the coastal support mission, the Checkerboards now carried another weapon, the 11.75-inch Tiny Tim air-to-ground

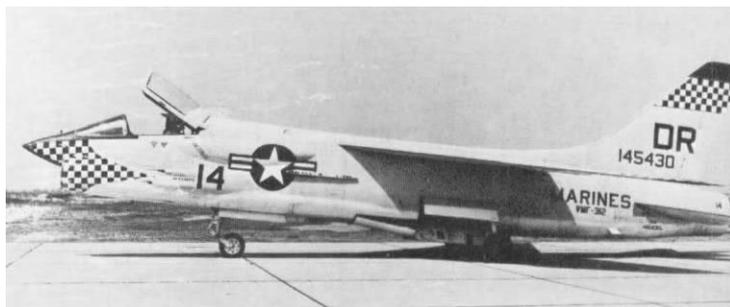


USMC Photo 527969

After the Korean War, VMA-312 moved into the jet age with the Grumman F9F-4 Panther (top left). In November 1954, VMA-312's Panther jets were replaced by the North American FJ-2 Fury and later the FJ-3 model (lower left). The Chance-Vought F8U-1 Crusader replaced the FJ-3 in mid-1959. The Crusader was a high performance fighter that could reach speeds in excess of 1,000 miles per hour at an altitude of more than 50,000 feet.



USMC Photo A143040



USMC Photo A601141

rocket. Occasional sightings of enemy MIGs kept the pilots watchful, but only a few actual encounters were reported as the Communist pilots seemed reluctant to attack. Combat air patrol, armed reconnaissance, prebriefed strikes, photo and weather reconnaissance, and air spotting for naval gunfire encompassed the major portion of the missions during these months afloat.

On 24 February, Major David Cleeland was shot down over the Haeju Peninsula and made a successful landing on a frozen reservoir. With the three remaining Corsairs from his flight flying cover, Major Cleeland made a run for safety. A Communist cavalry unit saw the Corsair land and in a flurry of bugle calls and waving sabers, the unit charged. Slipping and falling across the frozen lake, the horsemen were no match for the cannon and bombs of the Corsairs. Those not killed by Marine fire were left swimming in the freezing water after the ice had broken from repeated hits. Soon Major Cleeland was in a helicopter and en route to safety.

On 23 April, during an in-port replenishment period at Sasebo, the squadron was conducting FCLPs for newly joined pilots when First Lieutenant Raymond E. Dunlap was killed in a landing accident. After returning to Korean waters, the Checkerboards suffered another loss. On 2 May the executive officer, Major Grover R. Betzer, was hit by heavy antiaircraft fire and his plane burst into flames and crashed.

On 9 May, during the next in-port period, the unit transferred to the *Bairoko* and on 14 May was on its way back to the operating area in the Yellow Sea.

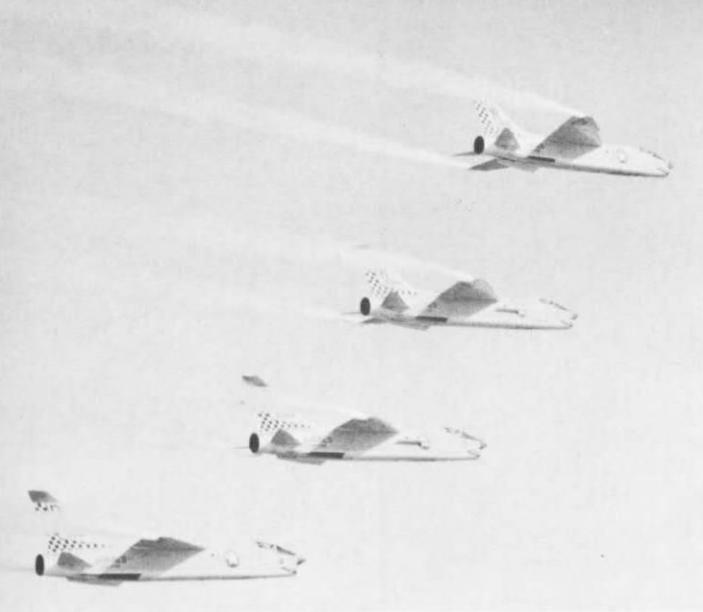
Before May came to an end, two more combat and three operational losses were recorded, but in all cases the pilots were rescued.

On 8 June 1953, the ship docked at Itami where the Polka Dots of VMA-332 were waiting to replace the Checkerboards on board the *Bairoko*. For VMA-312 the war in Korea was over. Personnel who had not completed their tours were transferred to other units. On 16 June the flag was folded and Captain Harry B. Stuckey brought the squadron, reduced to himself and five enlisted Marines, to its new home at MCAS, Miami, Florida.

New Aircraft and New Alerts

On 21 June the unit officially arrived at Miami and was assigned to MAG-32, 3d MAW. Three days later, Major Charles A. House became the commanding officer. Between 21-30 June, more Marines were joined bringing the total strength to 6 officers and 87 enlisted men. The unit then began receiving Grumman F9F-4 Panthers. This jet-powered fighter had a top speed of 526 miles per hour at 22,000 feet and a service ceiling of 44,000 feet.

The Checkerboards were stationed at Miami for seven months, then, on 5 January 1954, Major Thomas J. Saxon took command and a week later led the first contingent of aircraft to their new duty at MCAS, Cherry Point, North Carolina, where they were assigned to MAG-32, 2d MAW. On 15 February the squadron's designation reverted to Marine Fighter Squadron 312. During the following months the Checkerboards participated in several



USMC Photo A146404

Crusader jets from VMF-312 on a routine training flight off Newport Beach in southern California.

exercises at Camp Lejeune, including Operation Tantaglex 1-54 and Operation Packard V.

In November 1954, VMF-312 took delivery of its first swept-wing aircraft, the North American FJ-2 Fury. With a 6,100-pound thrust engine, the Fury was capable of a speed of 650 miles per hour at sea level and had a service ceiling of 48,000 feet. In February 1955, the squadron deployed to Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico for two months of gunnery and tactics exercises. By 1956 the Checkerboards had received the new version of the Fury, the FJ-3. Introduced to VMF-312 in October 1956, the FJ-3 was similar in appearance to the FJ-2, but had a larger 7,200-pound thrust engine.⁷

In 1957 the squadron had a busy and interesting year of operations, including a deployment to the Canal Zone, carrier qualifications on board the USS *Saratoga* (CVA 60) in July, and a Mediterranean cruise on board the USS *Lake Champlain* (CVS 39) lasting from 3 September until 29 October 1957. While in the Mediterranean, VMF-312 conducted combined operations with Greek units while flying from a strip at Tanagra, Greece. On 29 October VMF-312 left the carrier at Onslow Beach, North Carolina and returned to Cherry Point.

The squadron was immediately faced with the task of preparing to move, along with MAG-32, to the newly opened air station at Beaufort, South Carolina, a few miles from the site of old Page Field where VMF-312 originated. On 13 November, with the arrival of the commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas H. Hughes, Jr., the move was completed.

In March 1958, Lieutenant Colonel Hughes became VMF-312's third commanding officer killed

during squadron flight operations. Hughes failed to return from an overwater calibration flight from Norfolk, Virginia.

During the next few months, the FJ-3s were replaced with the FJ-3Ms. Basically the same aircraft as the FJ-3, the FJ-3M was equipped with Sidewinder air-to-air missiles, in-flight refueling equipment, and control improvements for greater stability at high speeds.

From October to December 1958, while the Castro rebellion was at its peak, VMF-312 deployed to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Returning to Beaufort, the Checkerboards participated in normal training exercises until mid-1959 when flight operations were cancelled while the squadron exchanged its Furies for Chance Vought F8U-1 Crusaders.

The single-place F8U fighter, powered by a 16,000-pound thrust engine with afterburner, was capable of speeds in excess of 1,000 miles per hour at an altitude of more than 50,000 feet. At that time, the F8U was the only operational aircraft to employ a two-position wing, one position for low speeds to increase stability for landing and another position for supersonic flight. In addition to four 20mm cannon, the Crusader could carry two Sidewinder missiles or high velocity aircraft rockets for close air support.⁸

With the new aircraft, the squadron began intensive training in preparation for a deployment to the Far East. Excellent training was accomplished during two deployments to Guantanamo Bay from 13 November to 13 December 1959 and again from 21 February to 11 March 1960. On 25 June, VMF-312 deployed to NAS, Mayport, Florida, where the pilots flew on board the USS *Saratoga* for a week of carrier qualifications. The period between 1 August and 15 November 1960 was spent in tactics training, missile firing, and other general deployment preparations. On 15 November the squadron was officially detached from MAG-32 and headed for NAS, Atsugi, Japan.

On 1 January 1961, VMF-312 joined MAG-11, 1st MAF relieving VMF-251 and taking custody of its F8U-1Es. The 1E model was identical to the F8U-1, but had improved target acquisition radar and fire control equipment.

For the first few months the squadron spent the majority of its time flying instrument hops, supporting Marines at the Fuji training area, practicing in-flight refueling, and flying field mirror landings (FMLP) at Kisarazu Field on Tokyo Bay. Normal training was interrupted during the first week in

March for carrier qualifications on board the USS *Coral Sea* (CVA 43). After the carrier qualifications, the unit returned to normal operations. In addition two fully armed Crusaders were placed on five-minute ready alert to augment the 41st Air Division's air defense of Japan. Several flights were scrambled, but the "bogies" consistently avoided interception by returning to the north.

In response to the Communist activity in Southeast Asia, on 23 March VMF-312 was directed to prepare for deployment to the Philippines. The next day, half of the aircraft flew from Atsugi to NAS, Cubi Point and by the 26th the entire squadron was in the Philippines. On 28 March, the squadron moved on board the USS *Midway* (CVA 41) as part of the ship's Carrier Air Group 2 (CAG 2). For a period of three weeks, while the task force sailed in the South China Sea near the shores of South Vietnam, VMF-312 flew armed combat air patrol missions over the fleet. At the end of this deployment the squadron returned to Cubi Point.

On 29 April, almost as suddenly as the first movement order, VMF-312 received orders to fly to the USS *Coral Sea*, then operating about 500 miles to the west of Cubi Point. The flight echelon flew out

that same morning while the ground echelon followed in Grumman TF-1 Traders. The squadron was assigned to CAG-14 and again flew combat air patrol over the fleet. On 10 May, the Checkerboards flew back to Cubi Point where they remained until returning to Atsugi on 31 May.

The summer of 1961 marked a period of rework for the aircraft involving the installation of Martin-Baker ejection seats, then a deployment to MCAS, Iwakuni for ground control intercept training. By the end of the summer, the squadron was prepared for another move south.

On 30 September, VMF-312 was again at Cubi Point. The next two weeks were spent in FMLP, culminating in carrier qualifications on board the USS *Ticonderoga* (CVA 14). For the next two weeks the pilots fired missiles and flew gunnery and tactics flights.

On 1 November, the unit returned to Atsugi where it remained until relieved by VMF-451 in January 1962. From Japan the squadron moved to MCAS, El Toro, California, where it was reassigned to MAG-33, 3d MAW. The squadron remained on the west coast for 18 months as VMF-312 then, with the unit designation changed to Marine All Weather



USMC Photo A143221

Four McDonnell F-4B Phantom jets from VMFA-312 in flight near Beaufort, South Carolina.

Fighter Squadron 312 (VMF(AW)-312), the Checkerboards continued normal training until returning to Japan on 1 February 1965.

While in Japan the squadron operated first from Atsugi with MAG-11 then, on 26 June, joined MAG-13 at Iwakuni. With the tempo of operations increasing in Southeast Asia, the 24 officers, 171 enlisted men, and 21 F8U-1Es of 312 awaited assignment to the combat area.

The Vietnam Era and Subsequent Operations

The opportunity finally came on 19 December 1965. Arriving at Da Nang Airbase in Vietnam, the squadron rejoined MAG-11 and was soon flying missions over the I and II Corps areas. The majority of the flights consisted of helicopter escort, close air support, and TPQ-10 radar bombing. By the end of January 1966, the Checkerboard crews were veterans of 718 combat missions, but for VMF(AW)-312 this was the end of the war. After transferring all aircraft and equipment to VMF(AW)-235, recently arrived from MCAS, Beaufort, the Checkerboard flag was folded and carried to Beaufort by First Lieutenant Dennis A. Panger.

When the squadron was reestablished on 1 February 1966, it was redesignated Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 312 (VMFA 312). The squadron was assigned to MAG-32, 2d MAW and before the end of February was equipped with the new McDonnell F4B-Phantom II. Capable of speeds in excess of Mach 2, the twin-engined, two-seated, all-weather fighter carried both a pilot and a radar intercept operator. The Phantom could be armed with approximately 16,000 pounds of nuclear or conventional bombs and rockets on five attachment points under the wings and fuselage.⁹

The squadron's first training deployment with the F4B was to NAS, Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico from 5 to 13 August 1966. After successful completion of this deployment, the Checkerboards were involved in a variety of deployments which provided training for aircrews bound for Vietnam and maintained unit readiness. The highlights of the training for the years which followed were:

19 September-3 October 1966—Deployed to MCAS Yuma with 10 aircraft for ordnance training.

January-July 1967—Three more deployments were made to Yuma: 4-23 January, 11-30 April, and 11 June-1 July 1967.

13 November-9 December 1967—Deployed to Roosevelt Roads for intensive training for WestPac replacements.



USMC Photo A141644

A Phantom crew from VMFA-312 prepares to stretch their legs after a long journey from Key West, Florida to Cherry Point, North Carolina.

11-28 March 1968—The first of the NAS, Key West detachments. (CINCLant Detachment 14). This alert duty was rotated among 2d MAW units. The Checkerboards employed up to seven planes at Key West.

7-14 July 1969—Deployed to Roosevelt Roads with 11 aircraft.

On 10 December 1970, Major Ronald G. Kropp assumed command of VMFA-312, becoming the second naval flight officer to command a Marine Phantom squadron. Five days later, flight operations ceased as the Checkerboards prepared to move again. On 15 January 1971, the squadron arrived at MCAS, Cherry Point and was reassigned to MAG-14, 2d MAW. The remainder of the year was free of deployments; the only major exercise in which VMFA-312 participated was Exotic Dancer IV held in North Carolina from 1-14 May.

The squadron reassumed the CINCLant Detachment 14 duty at Key West in January 1972. This deployment was followed in the spring and summer by several exercises. Included in these exercises was Exotic Dancer V, which the Checkerboard Phantoms supported from Marine Corps Auxillary Landing Field, Bogue, North Carolina. For seven days the crews flew in weather which at times lowered ceilings

to 200 feet and the visibility to less than one-half mile. A deployment to Roosevelt Roads from 14 October until 4 November 1972 closed out the year's operations.

On 5 January 1973, the squadron received word that its F4Bs would be replaced with the newer F4J model. This version incorporated a design change which allowed for slower approach speeds, in spite of increased landing weight. This feature, plus a new fire control and bombing system, were the major changes.

Acceptance of the F4Js was completed by 23 February. After completion of ground training in the aircraft's systems, the squadron was ready to try its new wings. Two successful deployments to Key West from 14 June-14 July and 14 August-14 Sep-

tember 1973 proved the squadron was again a ready force.

For the Checkerboards, 1974 brought another change in location. On 1 August the squadron returned to MCAS, Beaufort and joined MAG-31, 2d MAW.

Even with the complication of a move to a new air station, VMFA-312 still won the CNO Aviation Safety Award for FY-74. The award was formally presented to the squadron on 18 April 1975.

Various deployments during 1976 and early 1977, along with numerous exercises and operations, provided the squadron pilots and crews with the flight experience which increased the squadron's efficiency and combat readiness. VMFA-312 is once again located just a few miles from Page Field and ready to serve Corps and country.

NOTES

Organization and Training

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from VMF-312 War Diaries, June 1943-March 1945. All material is located in Hist&MusDiv, HQMC.

1. *Jane's All the World's Aircraft* 1942, compiled and edited by Leonard Bridgman (New York: McMillan Co., 1942), p. 205C, hereafter, *Jane's Aircraft* and date.

2. *Jane's Aircraft* 1942, p. 221C

Okinawa—Action at Last

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from VMF-312 War Diaries, March 1945-January 1946.

3. Robert Sherrod, *History of Marine Corps Aviation in World War II* (Washington: Combat Forces Press, 1952), p. 380, hereafter, Sherrod, *Aviation*.

4. Sherrod, *Aviation*, p. 392.

Reorganization and More Training

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from VMF-312 War Diaries, February 1946-July 1950 VMF-312 Muster Rolls, February 1946-July 1950; and

VMFA-312 Squadron History File, hereafter, *VMFA-312 Hist File*.

5. *Jane's Aircraft* 1948 p. 266C.

Korea

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from VMF-312 War Diaries, July 1950-June 1953, and *VMFA-312 Hist File*.

6. BGen Edwin H. Simmons, *The United States Marines 1775-1975* (New York: The Viking Press, 1976.), p. 241.

New Aircraft and New Alerts

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from VMF-312 Muster Rolls, January 1954-February 1965; *Windsock*, (MCAS Cherry Point, North Carolina), February 1954-November 1954; and *VMFA-312 Hist File*.

7. *Jane's Aircraft* 1955-56, p. 297.

8. *Jane's Aircraft* 1959-60, pp. 271-272.

Vietnam Era and Subsequent Operations

Unless otherwise noted, the material in this section is derived from VMF(AW)-312 Command Chronologies, December 1965-June 1977; and *VMFA-312 Hist File*.

9. *Jane's Aircraft* 1966-67, p. 284.

APPENDIX A

CHRONOLOGY

- 1 Jun 1943—Activated as Marine Fighting Squadron 312, MAG-31, 1st MAW at Parris Island, South Carolina.
- August 1943—Reassigned to MAG-32, 3d MAW.
- January 1944—Relocated to San Diego, Calif.
- March 1944—Deployed to Ewa, Territory of Hawaii, and reassigned to MAG-32, Marine Aircraft, Hawaiian Area.
- July 1944—Redeployed to Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides, and reassigned to MAG-11, 2d MAW.
- Mar-April 1945—Participated in Okinawa campaign.
- Sept 1945-Feb 1946—Participated in the occupation of Okinawa.
- Mar 1946—Relocated to El Toro, California, and reassigned to MAG-33, Marine Aircraft, West Coast.
- Oct 1947—Reassigned to MAG-33, 1st MAW.
- 1 Dec 1949—Redesignated as Marine Fighter Squadron 312.
- July 1950—Reassigned to MAG-12, 1st MAW.
- Aug 1950—Deployed to Kobe, Japan.
- Sept 1950-Jun 1953—Participated in Korean War operating from Chosin Reservoir, East-Central Front, Western Front, Japan, and various carriers.
- 1 Mar 1952—Redesignated as Marine Attack Squadron 312.
- Jun 1953—Relocated to Miami, Florida, and reassigned to MAG-33, 3d MAW.
- Jan 1954—Relocated to Cherry Point, North Carolina, and reassigned to MAG-32, 2d MAW.
- 15 Feb 1954—Redesignated as Marine Fighter Squadron 312.
- Nov 1957—Relocated to Beaufort, South Carolina.
- Dec 1960—Deployed to Atsugi, Japan.
- Jan 1961—Reassigned to MAG-11, 1st MAW.
- Jan 1962—Relocated to El Toro, California, and reassigned to MAG-33, 3d MAW.
- 1 Aug 1963—Redesignated as Marine All Weather Fighter Squadron 312.
- Feb 1965—Deployed to Atsugi, Japan and reassigned to MAG-11, 1st MAW.
- Jun 1965—Redeployed to Iwakuni, Japan and reassigned to MAG-13, 1st MAW.
- Dec 1965—Redeployed to the Republic of Vietnam and reassigned to MAG-11, 1st MAW.
- Dec 1965-Jan 1966—Participated in the war in Vietnam operating from Da Nang.
- 1 Feb 1966—Relocated to Beaufort, South Carolina, and redesignated as Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 312 and reassigned to MAG-32, 2d MAW.
- 15 Jan 1971—Relocated to Cherry Point, North Carolina, and reassigned to MAG-14, 2d MAW.
- 14 Jun 1973—Deployed to Key West.
- 1 Aug 1974—Relocated to Beaufort, South Carolina, and reassigned to MAG-31, 2d MAW.

APPENDIX B

COMMANDING OFFICERS

Maj Richard M. Day	1 Jun 1943 - 13 May 1945
Maj Hugh I. Russell	14 May 1945 - 24 May 1945
Maj J. Frank Cole	25 May 1945 - 18 Sep 1945
LtCol Lowell D. Grow	19 Sep 1945 - 1 Oct 1945
Capt Rexford L. Linde	2 Oct 1945 - 28 Nov 1945
Maj Claude H. Welch	29 Nov 1945 - 6 Jan 1946
Capt LeRoy T. Frey	7 Jan 1946 - 13 Mar 1946
LtCol Perry L. Shuman	14 Mar 1946 - 31 Jan 1947
Capt Edwin E. Shifflett	1 Feb 1947 - 10 Feb 1947
Maj John L. Dexter	11 Feb 1947 - 27 Feb 1948
Maj James W. Poindexter	28 Feb 1948 - 13 Feb 1949
LtCol Thomas J. Ahern	14 Feb 1949 - 11 Jun 1950
LtCol Charles E. McLean, Jr.	12 Jun 1950 - 25 Jun 1950
LtCol J. Frank Cole	26 Jun 1950 - 26 Jan 1951
Maj Donald P. Frame	27 Jan 1951 - 4 Apr 1951
Maj Frank H. Presley	5 Apr 1951 - 22 Jun 1951
Maj Edward J. McGee	23 Jun 1951 - 16 Aug 1951
LtCol Russell D. Rupp	17 Aug 1951 - 8 Jan 1952
LtCol Joe H. McGlothlin, Jr.	9 Jan 1952 - 8 Apr 1952
LtCol Robert E. Smith, Jr.	9 Apr 1952 - 10 Jul 1952
LtCol George C. Axtell, Jr.	11 Jul 1952 - 3 Oct 1952
LtCol Robert E. Cameron	4 Oct 1952 - 3 Jan 1953
LtCol Winston E. Jewson	4 Jan 1953 - 15 Jun 1953
Capt Harry B. Stuckey	16 Jun 1953 - 8 Jul 1953
LtCol Robert J. Shelley, Jr.	9 Jul 1953 - 16 Oct 1953
LtCol Hardy Hay	17 Oct 1953 - 4 Jan 1954
Maj Thomas J. Saxon, Jr.	5 Jan 1954 - 6 Jun 1954
LtCol Arnold A. Lund	7 Jun 1954 - 18 May 1955
Maj Robert Baird	19 May 1955 - 8 Sep 1955
LtCol Harold A. Harwood	9 Sep 1955 - 25 May 1956
LtCol Edwin E. Shifflett	26 May 1956 - 15 Oct 1956
LtCol Samuel B. Folsom, Jr.	16 Oct 1956 - 31 Oct 1957
LtCol Thomas H. Hughes, Jr.	1 Nov 1957 - 16 Mar 1958
LtCol Louis R. Smunk	17 Mar 1958 - 1 Jun 1959
Maj Roy C. Gray, Jr.	2 Jun 1959 - 31 Jul 1959
LtCol Robert L. Lamar	1 Aug 1959 - 24 Jun 1960
Maj Richard S. Rash	25 Jun 1960 - 1 Feb 1962
LtCol Lawrence McGlade	2 Feb 1962 - 10 Jul 1962
LtCol Dean Wilker	11 Jul 1962 - 26 Jul 1963
LtCol Robert C. Lehnert	27 Jul 1963 - 31 Jan 1964
LtCol Richard B. Newport	1 Feb 1964 - 1 Feb 1966
Maj Prentice A. Lindsay	2 Feb 1966 - 4 Aug 1966
LtCol Herbert V. Lundin	5 Aug 1966 - 25 May 1967
LtCol Thomas R. Morgan	26 May 1967 - 6 Aug 1967
LtCol Hal W. Vincent	7 Aug 1967 - 14 Jun 1968
LtCol Thomas E. Bradley	15 Jun 1968 - 21 Nov 1969

LtCol Carl J. Eversole 22 Nov 1969 - 10 Dec 1970
 Maj Ronald G. Kropp 11 Dec 1970 - 3 Dec 1971
 Maj Robert T. Roche 4 Dec 1971 - 2 Apr 1974
 LtCol William M. Foley 3 Apr 1974 - 18 Jun 1975
 LtCol Karl S. Smith 19 Jun 1975 - 2 Jun 1976
 Maj Frederick B. Craig 3 Jun 1976 - 15 Jun 1977
 Maj Charles T. Huckelbery 16 Jun 1977

APPENDIX C

STREAMER ENTITLEMENTS

PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION STREAMER WITH TWO BRONZE STARS

Okinawa, 4 Apr-14 Jul 1945
Korea, 15 Sep-11 Oct 1950
Korea, 8 Mar-30 Apr, 18 May-30 Jun, and 3 Aug-19 Sep 1951

PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION (ARMY) STREAMER

Korea, 22 Nov-14 Dec 1950

NAVY UNIT COMMENDATION STREAMER

Korea, 1 Aug 1952-27 Jul 1953

ASIATIC-PACIFIC CAMPAIGN STREAMER WITH ONE BRONZE STAR

Okinawa Gunto Operation, 4 Apr-20 Jun 1945

WORLD WAR II VICTORY STREAMER

1 Jun 1943-31 Dec 1946

NAVY OCCUPATION SERVICE STREAMER WITH ASIA CLASP

Okinawa, 2 Sep 1945-6 Feb 1946

NATIONAL DEFENSE SERVICE STREAMER WITH ONE BRONZE STAR

27 Jun 1950-27 Jul 1954
1 Jan 1961-15 Aug 1974

KOREAN SERVICE STREAMER WITH ONE SILVER AND FOUR BRONZE STARS

North Korean Aggression, 28 Sep-2 Nov 1950
Communist China Aggression, 3 Nov 1950-24 Jan 1951
First U N Counteroffensive, 25 Jan-21 Apr 1951
Communist China Spring Offensive, 22 Apr-8 Jul 1951
U N Summer-Fall Offensive, 9 Jul-27 Nov 1951
Second Korean Winter, 28 Nov 1951-30 Apr 1952
Korean Defense, Summer-Fall, 1952, 1 May-30 Nov 1952
Third Korean Winter, 1 Dec 1952-30 Apr 1953
Korea, Summer-Fall, 1953, 1 May-16 Jun 1953

KOREAN PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION STREAMER

28 Sep 1950-26 Feb 1951
27 Feb 1951-11 Jun 1953

VIETNAM SERVICE STREAMER WITH TWO BRONZE STARS

Vietnam Defense Campaign, 19-24 Dec 1965
Vietnamese Counter Offensive Campaign, 24 Dec 1965-31 Jan 1966

VIETNAM CROSS OF GALLANTRY WITH PALM

19 Dec 65-31 Jan 66

The heart of VMFA-312's insignia bears the famed checkerboard so prevalent on its aircraft throughout the squadron's history. The aircraft carrier in the lower left hand corner and the landing field in the upper right hand corner depict the dual role of Marine aviation, that of being able to operate at sea or on land.

