



Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA-251) was activated December 1, 1941 at NAS North Island, CA, as Marine Observation Squadron 251 (VMO-251), flying the Grumman F4F "Wildcat."

During World War II, the squadron participated in numerous Pacific campaigns. In 1944, the squadron transitioned to the F-4U "Corsair," and was redesignated Marine Fighter Squadron 251 (VMF-251). In the following years VMF-251 was decommissioned and recommissioned as a ready reserve squadron at Gross Isle, MI. With the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, VMF-251 was recalled to active service and directed to transition to the AD-4D "Skyraider."



The squadron moved to Korea in June of 1953 and flew the last Marine combat mission of the war. In January of 1956, it relocated to MCAS Iwakuni, Japan to remain in the Far East an additional fifteen months. In 1957, VMF-251 was reconstituted to MCAS Miami, FL, and later, the squadron moved to MCAS El Toro, CA to receive its first supersonic fighter, the F-8U "Crusader."

The "Thunderbolts" departed MCAS El Toro for the Pacific carrying with them the motto "Custos Caelorum," meaning guardians of the sky. In 1960, VMF-251 was assigned to Marine Aircraft Group 31 at MCAS Beaufort, SC. During this period VMF-251 was the first Marine F-8 squadron to deploy aboard an aircraft carrier as part of Carrier Air Wing 8 on the *USS S Hangri-La*.



In October of 1964, the squadron transitioned to the F-4B "Phantom II" and received its current designation as Marine Fighter Attack Squadron-251 (VMFA-251). The "Thunderbolts" flew the F4 in four different models for the next 21 years. In 1969, VMFA-251 received the Robert M. Hanson Award as the "Marine Fighter Squadron of the Year." That same year the squadron also won the CNO Safety Award as the first Marine F4 squadron to surpass 25,000 accident free flight hours. In 1978, the squadron won the Commandant's Aviation Efficiency Trophy as the "Most

Outstanding Marine Fighter Squadron of the Year." In November of 1985, 21 years and 85,000 flight hours later, VMFA-251 flew its last F-4S Phantom.

During January of 1986, the "Thunderbolts" transitioned to the F/A-18 "Hornet." The squadron stood up as the sixth Marine F/A-18 squadron the following August and reported fully combat ready in March of 1987. Over the next 6 years, the squadron participated in the WESTPAC Rotation Program, completing 3 six month deployments to Iwakuni, Japan flying the F/A-18 Hornet.

From January 1994 to April 1994, the "Thunderbolts" participated in close air support combat missions while deployed to Aviano, Italy in support of the United Nations peacekeeping efforts in Bosnia-Herzegovina. These missions marked the only combat sorties for a Marine Squadron in Europe since World War I. In May 1994, VMFA-251 received new F/A-18C Hornets in preparation for assignment to Carrier Air Wing-1 aboard the *USS America*.

The "Thunderbolts" successfully completed its first carrier deployment with F/A-18's. VMFA-251 participated in many NATO operations during CVW-1's Mediterranean deployment. After the squadron's return home to Beaufort, it began its rigorous training schedule to prepare for its next deployment. The "Thunderbolts" deployed two additional times with CVW-1, aboard the *USS George Washington* and *USS John F. Kennedy*.

During these deployments, the *USS George Washington* and *USS John F. Kennedy* were ordered to the Persian Gulf to help support United Nations operations. The "Thunderbolts" returned home in March 2000, after two 6-month sea deployments, to Marine Aircraft Group 31, MCAS Beaufort, SC. The squadron is preparing to deploy again with CVW-1, aboard the *USS Theodore Roosevelt*, in late 2001.

