

Tourists Eye Big Military Buildup in Florida Keys



INSPECTS HAWK—Lt. Mark Manley, 22, of Cincinnati, Ohio, inspects mounted ground-to-air Hawk missile at the U.S. Army's rocket area near Key West, Florida. (UPI)

By JACK V. FOX
United Press International
Key West, Fla.—(UPI)—Driving down the ribbon of U.S. Highway 1 that ties the Florida Keys to the mainland, the tourist keeps a sharp eye for what he has heard is a big military buildup close to Castro's Cuba.

There have been reports of huge missiles rolling along Duval street which runs across the town of Key West from the Atlantic to the Gulf of Mexico.

Stories of truck convoys, stretching for miles, on the highway. Gossip of "hard-wares" and "troops" in such quantity that the keys must surely sink. Second hand rumors of generals muttering: "We have enough now."

Missiles Missing
But if it is there, it is the greatest job of camouflage yet.

Most of these little coral islands are so narrow and so barren that concealment is next to impossible. What the vacationer sees are motels and marinas and fishermen on the causeways (one seven miles long) and dozens of signs proclaiming the virtues of Key Lime Pie.

It is not until the car rolls onto Saddle Bunch Key that the first evidence of a "build-up" can be seen. There, in plain view, is a battery of Hawk ground-to-air rockets pointed toward Cuba. The Hawk is used in knocking down low and medium altitude aircraft.

This particular battery has the primary job of defending the huge Boca Chica Naval Air Station—90 miles from Havana.

Pull into that U.S. Army rocket area and you get a pleasant greeting from commanding officer, Capt. Tommy Thompson of Tacoma, Wash. A quick call to the colonel in Key West and Thompson okays a reporter and photographer taking a closeup look at the Hawk installation.

Manley Controls
Fire control officer is 22-year-old Lt. Mark Manley of Cincinnati. Manley and the 100 or so men of the unit moved in here shortly after the late October confrontation with the Soviet Union over Russian missiles in Cuba. For a time, they were on a 24-hour battle-station basis. This is one of four batteries in the lower Keys under the command of Col. Marvin Nolte of St. Louis, Mo. Nolte says his is the only tactical Army unit in the Key West area.

It is apparent that the American military posture in this area at present is primarily defensive.

Military security, however, is tight. Newsmen are not permitted on the naval air station at Key West although White House correspondents were there recently when President Kennedy visited the base. It was a favorite vacation spot for President Truman.

At the Strategic Air Command's Homestead Air Force Base, 25 miles south of Miami, home of the 19th bomb group under Col. Richard B. Stewart, security is also close. The base recently underwent a simulated nuclear attack.

New Jets Patrol
An Army Hawk missile command also has been stationed there and early in March the air defense command moved in with the new F104 Starfighter jets for patrol and interception.

Near the town of Marathon, halfway down the Keys, is an airstrip as long as those at New York's International airport. The runway is capable of handling the biggest jet military transports and bombers.

At the height of the October-November crisis, Marathon was, in fact, jammed with combat troops ready for airborne operations. They have since pulled out.

Tourist Gain
New York — (UPI)—Retail establishments spent \$780 million for trading stamps during 1962 and are expected to spend about \$820 million in 1963, according to Sperry and Hutchinson Co., makers of S and H Green stamps.

What has been the effect of the Cuban crisis on the southern Florida tourist trade? The winter peak is just ending and, for Miami itself, this has been one of the best years ever. Hialeah race track did its biggest business in history. In the keys, resorts suffered about an 8 per cent falloff in November. But once the crisis passed, business was back to normal — or even better.

Colonel Nolte, who lives with a small staff and "garrison" in the old Casa Marina hotel in Key West, says he believes the whole affair attracted people curious to see the "military buildup."

"If you see any signs of it on the way back to Miami, let me know," he said.

SECTION B
MEDFORD TRIBUNE
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