



Gunny Bliss, air traffic control examiner, looks over his notes on the different personnel who work in the Air Traffic control tower and radar rooms.

Station ATC commended for assisting civilians during 1981 walkout

*Story and photo
by PFC Reggie Jones*

In August, 1981 the Federal Aviation Administration had an Air Traffic Controller strike which had the potential to seriously affect the nation's economy and, above all, imperil the level of safety that the aviation public has a right to expect," said Henry A. Duffy, President of the Airline Pilots Association.

Due to this potentially hazardous situation, air traffic controllers were called in from the Navy and Marine Corps to fill these empty billets. Gunnery Sergeant James R. Bliss, air traffic control examiner at New River, was one of the men called upon to take on this challenge.

"I was one of 12 men called upon during the crisis. I think we surprised the civilian air traffic controllers with our ability to do the job," stated Gunny Bliss.

The military personnel who were called arrived at Fort Lauderdale International Airport in Florida seven days after the strike began. But when they first arrived, they were given clearance delivery duty, which is a non-control position.

Then because of the shortage of air

traffic controllers, the military personnel were made ground and local controllers in the tower.

"The first couple of weeks were the hardest for us because we had to make the transition from military to civilian controls. It was a couple of weeks but we were able to fit into the billets we had to fill perfectly. After all, the system is basically the same," Bliss stated.

June 30, 1983 marked the last day of the military controllers important support to the civilian community. "They contributed greatly to the safety of all users of U.S. airspace in the last two years," said Paul R. Ignatius, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Air Transport Association.

Gunny Bliss and the rest of the controllers involved received seven letters of appreciation, including letters from the Secretary of the Navy, the Honorable Mr. John Lehman and General P. X. Kelley, Commandant of the Marine Corps on Sept. 8.

"Their expertise, ability to react rapidly to crises, and willingness to endure family separations as a result of this challenge, were certainly in the true spirit of the members of today's armed services," said Mr. Duffy.