

Army veterans get their due: Former Hawk soldiers return for Keys reunion.

Florida Keys Keynoter (Marathon, FL); 5/20/2006

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May 20--The U.S. Army is back in Key West - at least to visit. It's been many years since the Army vacated Key West as a base for its Hawk Missile Air Defense Artillery and even longer since it used the tiny island as a prominent location for the military group during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. But now, a group of Army veterans and their wives have returned to visit the place they once called home to receive recognition they are due. The group spent Thursday reliving the past and sightseeing in ways most Key West tourists never do by touring the four locations where the Army housed its Hawk missiles, as well as its Hawk radar site at Fort Zachary Taylor. Friday, all 31 - including both the veterans and their wives - received the Army Freedom Team Salute pins, which were only recently created as an award to pay tribute to the loved ones who stand behind Army soldiers. "This is an Army program that just began," said Wes Guidry, reunion planner.

The award program was initiated to honor those family members and employers who have never failed to support the soldiers. "The Freedom Team Salute gives active, reserve and National Guard soldiers an opportunity to recognize parents, spouses and employers for the support and strength they provide while [soldiers] serve to protect our freedom and the American way of life," the program Web site says. It's the Army's "way of thanking them for their service," Guidry said. The pin is accompanied by a certificate of appreciation from Army Chief of Staff Gen. Peter Schoomaker and Army Secretary Francis Harvey. Additionally, 11 of the veterans were given the Korean Defense Service medal for their service during the Korean War. Naval Air Station Key West Capt. Jim Scholl did the pinning of the medals. Those attending the reunion stayed at NAS Key West as they reminisced old times. The award ceremony, which took place Friday morning, was followed by a reception on the base.