

My Turn

How the Military Invades Our Everyday Lives

SUZY T. KANE

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How the Military Invades Our Everyday Lives” is the subtitle of a book by Nick Turse called “The Complex” — recommended reading for anyone concerned about the state of America’s democracy.

An obvious example of how the military invades our everyday lives is the whole proposed Low Altitude Training Navigation (LATN) over 60,700 beautiful, peaceful and silent square miles in Northern New Mexico and southern Colorado. The invasion played out at the meeting held in Taos at the Kachina Lodge on Tuesday night, Sept. 20, which according to Kachina Lodge staff was attended by “an easy 300.”

At the meeting Col. Kirk Smith, vice commander for the 27th Special Operations Wing at Cannon Air Force Base highlighted the Draft Environmental Assessment that he felt demonstrated that LATN pilots of the CV-22 Osprey and the C-130 Hercules aircraft would make little impact practicing at night.

Col. Smith turned over the Public Comment portion of the meeting to a civilian to run, although the civilian might have liked having the military invade his everyday life. He is an employee of Science Applications International Corporation, a company awarded a \$35 million contract by U.S. Special Operations Command.

Michael Levy, one of the commenters, is a private pilot.

He lives at the top of El Salto next to the wilderness area where the airspace 300 feet above his house would be fair game for frighteningly loud Osprey and Hercules practice, certainly invading his everyday life. Levy stepped up to the microphone, unfolding his aviation chart of New Mexico to show that the Air Force already commands the airspace of half of southern New Mexico.

According to the FAA, military airspace there totals approximately 27,000 square miles before adding in the contiguous approximately 13,000 square miles in southeastern Arizona. How much more airspace does the military need?

Levy told me by telephone that Holloman Air Force Base uses some of the above military airspace that includes mountainous terrain. Why can’t Holloman and Cannon share it?

What Col. Smith did not tell those who attended the meeting at the Kachina Lodge was that Cannon AF Base pilots not only learn to fly the Osprey and Hercules; pilots there also train to operate unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) or drones such as the MQ-1 Predator with a range of 454 miles and the MQ-9 Reaper with a range of 3,682 miles. (Holloman also trains pilots to fly the same model drones.) If LATN gets its foot in the door flying Ospreys and Herculeses over Northern New Mexico and southern Colorado at night, will Cannon feel free to fly drones over the same area by day?

Brian Shields is executive director of Amigos Bravos, an environmental organization that protects and restores water resources in New Mexico. He commented that he was a river runner on the R'o Grande in the 1970s, when a pilot of an Air Force jet was killed hotdogging his plane over the river. The daredevil dove under the R'o Grande Gorge Bridge, unaware of the electrical wiring strung over the river on the opposite side of the bridge that brought his plane down. Isn't it an invasion of our everyday lives that, as Shields warned, pilots today are just as susceptible to playing around with their planes and having such accidents?

Shields also commented on the successful community efforts (in 2006) to save the wildlife and environment in the Valle Vidal (from the oilmen who intended to use the dirty "fracking" method of extracting oil). With the elk herds and water sources in the Valle Vidal once again at risk under the proposed airspace of LATN, isn't the military invading our everyday lives by proposing to undo what so many ordinary people worked so hard to protect?

For those who think pilot training over desert and mountainous terrain will become unnecessary after the U.S. pulls out of Iraq and Afghanistan, Turse points out that "on any given day, America's (Special Operations Forces) are working in about 70 countries."

Turse reports that the Army spent \$6.3 million to \$19 million developing a popular video game called "America's Army" "to educate potential recruits on the army's mission and functions." The military is invading our everyday lives with "America's Army" right in the video game room of Taos' own Storyteller movie theater.

Suzy T. Kane, a resident of Taos, thanks Keith McHenry, a co-founder of the national organization Food Not Bombs, for information on the private contractor.