

## **My Turn**

### **Flights a danger to health, environment**

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I moved to the Embudo Valley in late 1977. It was not long, maybe a year or two, before I would experience an occasional large aircraft flying over my house at a very low altitude.

I called the Federal Aviation Administration and described it to a contact there, who said it sounded like a C-130, a military aircraft, and that it may have come from Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque.

It took several telephone calls before I talked to an officer from the 1550th Squadron at Kirtland. I described the aircraft and its approximate heading and altitude. He admitted it was theirs.

We discussed the effect of its overflight on my village.

He finally agreed to have his pilots ascend to 1,000 feet before they came over the area.

This was not the end.

Whenever there was a new commanding officer, or pilots temporarily stationed at Kirtland from other bases, the low-level flights resumed.

I would then call Kirtland and get another temporary reprieve.

This went on for about 25 years. It was hard on the residents.

When my friend's son was a baby, he became hysterical every time a plane flew low over their house. Dogs and horses were agitated.

Residents in the Embudo alcohol treatment center, some only a day or two out of detox, had serious problems with the flights. A turkey farmer lost birds, a goat keeper lost milk.

You must understand that there is no warning when a plane flies over at low altitude, particularly in a valley. It just appears, blotting out the sky, and the noise is terrifying.

When, in the 1990s, the Air Force requested a lowlevel flight path to a practice bombing range in Colorado for B1Bs and F111s, I did some research on the effect it could have on residents.

Low-level overflights can cause a temporary, drastic increase in heart rate and blood pressure, as well as mental distress. Repeated incidents can lead to heart disease, immune disorders and mental illness.

The effect would be exaggerated for children and seniors. Anyone whose immune system is already compromised by something like cancer or diabetes would be seriously affected.

Someone with a mental problem, in particular post-traumatic stress disorder, would be severely affected. In addition, the flights would take place at night.

Being awakened by the tremendous noise of a low level overflight would be frightening, and the resulting repeated loss of sleep would, again, contribute to serious health and social problems.

There would also be economic effects from the flights.

Sheep, cattle and horses could injure themselves, running in fright from the planes.

Socially, entire communities would be disrupted by the flights. Culturally, the peaceful character of life in rural villages would be destroyed.

One other aspect of the proposed low-level flights must be considered. Both the C-130 and the Osprey have had mechanical difficulties leading to crashes.

Flying at 300 feet, there are not many choices of emergency landing sites. If one of these planes crashed, it could wipe out an entire village.

Once the Air Force has a "wing in the door" allowing low-level overflights for propeller craft, it is possible they would expand use of the area to include jet, even supersonic, aircraft. Imagine the sudden appearance of a B-1 bomber at 300 feet over your head.

While I appreciate that our military must train to keep us safe, it does not make sense that they endanger our health, safety, economy and environment in doing so.

*Adele E. Zimmermann is a resident of Rinconada.*