



THE TAOS NEWS

Named Best U.S. Weekly Newspaper by the Nat'l. Newspaper Assoc. 2007, 2008
Inland Press Foundation Nation's Best Weekly Newspaper 2009

Air raids over Taos

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Citizens of Taos: you are being bombarded by the U.S. Air Force. Not with munitions, but with lies and half-truths.

A recent "My Turn" piece ("We are being asked to make a very small sacrifice," Oct. 28) was attributed to a retired Air Force officer, but bore all the hallmarks of a propaganda piece, carefully crafted by the PR personnel to push the right emotional buttons for us to support the troops and contribute to the war on terror, as true American patriots.

Let's take a careful look at it. Let's start with the article's headline, asking us to accept a "Very small sacrifice".

Taos is one of the most beautiful, peaceful, quiet places in the United States. Many of us have chosen to move here and live here for exactly that reason. The Air Force wants to train pilots over this area so that they are equipped to fly similar missions over similar terrain in foreign countries. In other words, they want to turn our peaceful, beautiful valley into a virtual combat zone, for wartime practice!

This is no "very small sacrifice." It amounts to destruction of our way of life, in the homes that we have worked hard to buy, build and live in.

Why is this type of training in mountainous terrain so necessary and important?

War zones in foreign countries include large cities, and pilots presumably need training over that kind of terrain also.

How long would the citizens of Manhattan tolerate Air Force training missions 200 feet above Central Park, night after night?

Not for very long, I think.

The author of "My Turn" and a retired Air Force pilot tells us that he lives under a low-flight military training route, and is sometimes woken by low flying aircraft at night. He tells us that he says a prayer of thanks and goes back to sleep.

Harley Davidson grew mightily after World War II selling loud bikes to former combat pilots that were addicted to the roar of piston engines in their military airplanes and needed more of that noise after they were demobilized.

Military pilots like noise. It fuels the adrenaline rush by which they live. Even, apparently, after they retire.

Taos residents do not, generally, share this addiction. The virtual absence of aircraft and traffic noise at night is one of the many delights of living here. The writer's grateful acceptance of it is no iustification for us to accept it or want it.

Taos has apparently been chosen for these flights because it is within easy and economical flying distance from Cannon Air Force Base, situated in Clovis.

The unspoken presumptions here are that there is a shortage of mountainous terrain in the U.S.A. for Air Force pilots to train over, and that Cannon Air Force Base is the only possible base of operations for these training missions.

I have been an aerial photographer for 17 years, and have been fortunate to fly a small airplane over every one of the lower 48 states, at low altitudes, for clients that include some of the nation's largest real estate companies, and the federal government, which hired me to capture aerial photographs of all of our nation's border crossings in the months after 9-11.

Let me assure you, gentle reader, in case you are under any illusion about this: There is no shortage of mountainous terrain in this country. For example, not very far from here, there is a huge area of uninhabited (and uninhabitable) mountainous terrain adjacent to the Mexican border, between Tucson and Yuma, Ariz., that is a no-fly zone for non-military aircraft because it is long established as a military flight training area. It stretches at least 100 miles east to west. (Go take a look at it in satellite view on Google Maps).

There is similar terrain not far west of Albuquerque, with few or no people to disturb.

A simple way to give "the very best training" that the writer desires for our nation's Air Force pilots would be to move the aircraft and their pilots and support crews to a base near such a similar, but unpopulated, area. They can then conduct their training where they will not create a virtual war zone over the heads of the citizens whom it is their mission to protect.

It is hard for me to understand how publishing the "My Turn" could be in the best interests of *The Taos News*. Allowing these flights to happen will, in all probability, decimate both the resident population of this area and its tourist traffic. Who wants to visit a practice aerial combat zone when they take a weekend off for a little quiet R&R? Who indeed?

And who will read, or advertise in, *The Taos News*

when everyone else has left? I applaud *Taos News* for publishing a view that is so contrary to your business interests, while I disagree vigorously with what you have printed.

We Taosenos do not need our night skies colored by our jets' red glare, Ospreys bursting through air, to convince us that our flag is still there. We are patriots who want to live the lives that we have chosen here, and not to have what we have worked for destroyed by it being turned into a semi-war zone.

Please do all that you can, as our mayor is doing, to encourage our troops and military guardians to get and to give the training that they need in a place where they will disturb only gophers and coyotes, not their neighbors and fellow citizens.

Richard Ebbs lives in Rancho de Taos.