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Military flights renew questions about airport expansion

By J.R. Logan

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Peggy and Mike Mabry were none-to-pleased to see two C-130 cargo planes making passes at the Taos Regional Airport Friday (Nov. 14). The Mabrys have been opponents of the Taos airport expansion and low-flying aircraft for decades. To them, the presence of military planes last week was further evidence that the construction of a second, longer runway at the airport would mean these sorts of military exercises would become more common.

“It was proof that [the military] is going to use that airport for whatever they want,” Peggy Mabry said.

But the military counters there’s nothing unusual about an occasional training flight in and around Taos.

“It’s not uncommon, but it’s not a regular thing,” said Carl Grusnick, operations chief for public affairs at Kirtland Air Force Base.

Grusnick said the planes in Taos on Friday were not from Kirkland, and he said Kirtland only does training flights at the Taos airport “on occasion.” Grusnick said the mountainous terrain and high elevation can make Taos a useful training location for some pilots.

A spokesperson for Cannon Air Force Base could not confirm if they planes came from that base by press time.

While the low-altitude passes of military planes might bother people like the Mabrys, it does not appear there are any regulations prohibiting such maneuvers.

Taos Town Manager Rick Bellis did not respond to questions about the flights, but there appears to be no regulation preventing any plane from “shooting an approach” (that is, making a pass at the runway without actually touching down).

Town officials have for years denied any suggestion the construction of the new runway is meant to accommodate additional military aircraft. They insist the new runway is meant to make the airport safer, especially under crosswind conditions.

Federal regulation do require all pilots to fly at least 500 feet above sparsely populated areas such as the mesa surrounding the airport.



Peggy Mabry took this photo with her cellphone of one of the low-flying military planes training near the Taos Municipal Airport, Friday (Nov. 13).

Courtesy Photo

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