Navy officials continue to warn of danger on bomb ranges
By ELIZABETH VARIN, Staff Writer
Thursday, April 29, 2010 1:01 AM PDT

PLASTER CITY — The U.S. Navy continues to warn people of the danger of being on a bombing range after a truck came within 2,000 feet of one of the targets and was hit with a practice bomb Saturday.

Student and instructor pilots from Kingsville, Texas, were training Saturday morning with T-45 Goshawks, training jets, out at the site north of here, said Cmdr. T. Robinette, operations officer for Naval Air Facility El Centro. One of the pilots dropped a 25-pound inert training round, which landed no more than 200 feet from the target.

After it hit the ground the ordnance skipped about 2,000 feet and hit a truck between its front fender and wheel, he said. No one was injured, and the car was drivable afterward.

The practice bomb was fairly close to the target "because they're so fast and so high of an altitude," he said of the jets the pilots were flying. Flying in at 350 to 400 knots and at 3,000 feet high makes it nearly impossible for the pilots to see cars, but they do make an initial pass to check for anything.

"What he was doing there, I don't know," Robinette said. "He should have never been on Navy property to begin with."

The driver was at least a mile and a half within the bombing range on all sides, which was a problem not only for him, but also for many who drive through the range during big holiday weekends.

It's a constant battle to keep people off of the range, especially during big off-road weekends, he said.

There are a number of people camping on land that is

JOSELITO VILLERO PHOTO
A World War II tank is used for target practice by pilots at Naval Air Facility El Centro. Remnants of the inert training rounds are scattered around the target Wednesday.

Multimedia

GALLERY: Naval Air Facility Bombing Range

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part of an active bomb range, said Naval Air Facility El Centro Commanding Officer Capt. Ritchard Thompson. They are putting themselves in danger and interfering with Navy exercises.

Though there aren’t live bombs being dropped, the inert ordnances are still dangerous, said base commanding officer Capt. Ritchard Thompson. The 25-pound smoke charge has the force of a shotgun blast when detonated, and it could hurt people or destroy vehicles if it lands on them.

In addition to the inert bombs being dangerous, it could waste taxpayers’ money, he said. Having people on the range interferes with the exercise, delaying it and wasting plane fuel.

That ends up costing money because planes fly over but can’t finish the exercise or have to postpone, he said. Fuel is expensive, and it’s wasted when the planes have to turn back.

The sole purpose of keeping people off the base is for safety, Robinette said.

“We go to great lengths to ensure the weapons are kept within range boundaries,” he said.

Calls to the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, which manages land around the range, were not returned.

>> Staff Writer Elizabeth Varin can be reached at evarin@ivpressonline.com or 760-337-3441.

Comments:

livspocal wrote on Apr 30, 2010 2:32 PM:

* Professor - Give me a break. What does military housing and electricity usage have to do with trespassing? And why should the military even have to worry about people encroaching on their lands?? That land is the Navy's land. It does not belong to every weekend idiot who feels its his God given right to ride their dirt buckets wherever they want to. Let's not try to be grown ups and look out for those "No Trespassing" signs and use our heads for something besides a helmut. The Navy has tried thousands of acres to prevent stuff like this from happening.

1) Newton law. When a pilot goes in for his bombing run he doesn't go straight down he goes in at an angle of attack. When he drops his bombs sometimes they'll go straight into the ground or they'll bounce off the target and keep on traveling until they impact something else or slow down and stop. It's just like when you skip a rock across a pond. That is why the navy owns thousands of acres to prevent stuff like this from happening.

2) If the guy got hit with a bomb he was in the bombing range period.

3) When pilots go in for their bombing runs they go on instruments and an armament computer that tells him when to drop. These bombs do not drop on a dime like most people think. That is why we have practice bombs so they can practice. These pilot pin point there target on there computers an go in for the runs by lookin at their HUD(Head Up Display).

4) Finally the military works 7 days a week 24 hours a day.

*tory4wheeler* wrote on Apr 29, 2010 10:55 PM:

* plus you have to remember these jet travel at over 450 miles an hour so for a bomb to skip across the ground for a half a mile is nothing.*

*tory4wheeler* wrote on Apr 29, 2010 10:53 PM:

* Okay guys first of all I'm in the military and I'm going to explain something that everyone should know.

1) Newton law. When a pilot goes in for his bombing run he doesn't go straight down he goes in at an angle of attack. When he drops his bombs sometimes they'll go straight into the ground or they'll bounce off the target and keep on traveling until they impact something else or slow down and stop. It's just like when you skip a rock across a pond. That is why the navy owns thousands of acres to prevent stuff like this from happening.

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*gotownvotes* wrote on Apr 29, 2010 5:48 PM:

* testing testing*

*holtyville* wrote on Apr 29, 2010 4:49 PM:

* professor: I bet the stories this guy will tell do a lot to keep people out of the Superstition range.

I disagree completely with your contention that the navy shouldn’t bomb when there are people in the area. What about
prerunners who are there during the week? What about those who want to enjoy the desert without the crowds who schedule their work on weekends so they can go out to the desert during the week? There will always be people there; they just need to learn where "there" is.

121088 wrote on Apr 29, 2010 11:15 AM:

" Wally's noggin old grunt? Now that would be like hitting on the cart path....."

121088 wrote on Apr 29, 2010 11:13 AM:

" The dropping of bombs is not like throwing velcro darts professor. You might want to think about what velocity the jet aircraft is moving at when it releases the bomb and then factor in the speed and angle at which the bomb moves toward the target after release from the aircraft. Since the practice bombs don't detonate on impact, and they don't stick like a lawn dart into the ground, it only stands to reason that they may "skip" and travel a significant distance from where they originally strike the surface. Considering the force at which these things strike the surface, skipping 2,000 feet does not seem to me to be an improbable distance. Duh......"

oldgrunt wrote on Apr 29, 2010 11:01 AM:

" The dummy bomb must have bounced off of supervisor wally's noggin to have gotten so much air."

professor wrote on Apr 29, 2010 10:25 AM:

" Somebody explain to me how a bomb like pictured above bounces 2000 feet after hitting the desert floor. What did it do? Hit the cart path. If that pilot can see that hunk of an old tank, he dam sure can see a ford F250 parked nearby. Capt Thomas, you want to talk about wasting money? I happen to know that no one living at NAF pays for electricity in their housing units. So Guess what happens in the summer? The thermostat goes to 70 degrees because who is paying for it, You and I. So please don't go gosh as our defense dept wastes more money than you and I can imagine. If you people know that on big holiday weekends you are going to have people encroaching on the range, why do you continue to bomb? The only way you will keep them out is to fence it. The encroachment is not going to stop, it's only going to get worse. So go bomb in the Chocolates and stay out fo Superstition."

sterig wrote on Apr 29, 2010 9:29 AM:

" how did Little Jose get so close to this target?"
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