

MILITARY ACTIVITIES IN NORTHWEST FLORIDA

Eglin Air Force Base has played a prominent role in airpower history and our national security for more than 65 years . In 1931, Army Air Corps personnel saw the potential of the sparsely populated areas surrounding Valparaiso, Florida, and the vast expanse of the Gulf of Mexico as a site for a bombing and gunnery range.



Soon afterward in 1937, a local businessman saw the potential of a military payroll to boost the depression-stricken economy in the local area. He donated 1500 acres of his land holdings for use as a gunnery range. The Federal Government made 340,000 acres of adjacent forest land available to the Army Air Corps. This became what is now the 724 square mile area that is Eglin Air Force Base and the Eglin Reservation.

The primary mission of the Base during World War II was to perform operational suitability testing for the Army Air Corps. As our area has developed and grown, so has the mission at Eglin. The weapons and missions are vastly more complex and the airplanes fly much faster. All four branches of our Armed Forces—The Air Force, Army, Navy, and Marines, have a significant presence and mission in our area. The skies over Eglin and Northwest Florida are among the busiest in the nation.



What you can expect

Noise

Noise is a by-product of military testing and training. The noise produced by activities on Eglin AFB can sometimes affect the population surrounding the base.



Some areas on Eglin AFB and beyond the Eglin Reservation boundary have increased levels of impulse or explosive noise. This noise is from munitions testing that is conducted on the ranges, and from Explosive Ordnance Disposal training done inside the Eglin Reservation boundary. Usually it sounds like distant thunder, but occasionally can be more intense.

Special Operations training conducted out of Hurlburt Field also contributes some impulse noise. Live fire exercises conducted at night with 20mm, 40mm, and 105mm cannon over both the east and west portions of the range can be heard. Explosive Ordnance Disposal training is also done at Hurlburt that can be heard in the Mary Esther/Florosa areas.

The intensity naturally decreases with distance from the source, but atmospheric conditions can play strange tricks with sound transmission. The normal extent of impulse noise experienced in our area can be seen [here](#).

Eglin AFB is the home of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, the newest aircraft in our nation's defense arsenal. This fifth-generation jet aircraft has been ten years in development, but the level of noise that it may generate when fully operational remains under study. The military is making every effort to reduce the impact of noise from its operation by attention to the altitude and direction in which it is flown, and providing strict procedures for pilots to follow for noise abatement. Sonic booms once common over the Florida Panhandle are now rare because of noise abatement efforts.



Eglin is the nation's largest Air Force Base. Aircraft operations generate noise. Whether the noise is created during operation or maintenance activities, takeoffs or landings, aircraft produce noise. Distance does diminish the level of noise, but it can be heard all around the area at different times.

Low Flying Aircraft

The skies over Northwest Florida are covered with military training routes, restricted airspace areas, and low-level training areas. Unless one is flying an airplane, these areas have little affect on the communities below, other than the opportunity to frequently see planes in the sky. The wide variety of aircraft used by the military and areas around the reservation where they commonly operate can be seen [here](#).



The most important areas for residents to be aware of are around the perimeter of the Eglin Reservation where there are Critical Approach routes into airstrips, landing zones, and drop zones for Special Operations Forces training. These areas are also shown on the map. The sudden appearance of a large low-flying aircraft can be disconcerting to the unsuspecting. Many of these operations are done at night and the aircraft are relatively quiet, so they may not be noticed until directly overhead. **It is very important to not point lights at these aircraft since the pilots are often training with night vision devices.**

Why is this important to you?

The size of the Eglin Reservation and its direct access to the Gulf of Mexico makes it a desirable environment for the military work that has been done here since 1937.

The sparse population around the Eglin Reservation was the driving force in the beginning of the Base as a bombing and gunnery range. Over time, the Base and the surrounding communities have grown and things have become more complicated.

A previous generation saw the value of a military payroll to ease the area out of the Great Depression. It is no different now. The economic benefit to Northwest Florida continues to be tremendous—our main economic engine. The Haas Center at the University of West Florida estimates the regional economic benefit of the military presence in Northwest Florida (from Escambia County to Jefferson County) at \$18.8 billion a year, providing 192,000 jobs, and total Defense spending (salaries, pensions, and procurement) of over \$6.9 billion each year.

As our national leaders seek to reduce the federal budget and the size of our military, the ability of our Base to interact with surrounding communities and successfully perform its missions becomes a serious consideration. **Activities in the community such as frequent noise complaints or demands for overflight avoidance areas can hinder mission accomplishment and may diminish the value and viability of the Base to the military.**

The military testing and training missions need to be understood by the public and supported by the surrounding communities for the bases to remain viable. If the missions cannot be done here, the military will have to look elsewhere. Whether the motivation is patriotism or the pocketbook, maintaining the military presence in Northwest Florida as we know it is vital to us all.



Many residents living in our area are here because of employment at the base. Military personnel assigned here often return when their service career ends to raise their families, invest in or support local businesses, and serve in our communities. Many raised here find meaningful employment on the base that would be hard to duplicate elsewhere. Others come for retirement or to invest in our growing area. All enjoy the unparalleled quality of life provided by our climate, citizenry, and level of development.

Prospective homebuyers and leasers are encouraged to become informed and knowledgeable about the military operations that are routinely conducted in Northwest Florida.

Residents who have become accustomed to the outward effects of the military missions should keep an awareness of the positive benefits those missions bring to our area.

Won't you help?