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Keys feel sonic boom

By David Ball dball@keynoter.com
Posted-Wednesday, February 16, 2005

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Naval fighters rattle homes up to Big Pine

The Lower Keys were booming last week when dogfighting U.S. Navy jets and perfect weather conditions led to supersonic blasts that were felt from Key West to Big Pine Key.



Jets such as this F/A-18 are practicing dogfights from Naval Air Station Key West. Sonic booms were heard as far north as Big Pine Key. Photo courtesy U.S. NAVY

According to Naval Air Station Key West spokesman Jim Brooks, several Keys residents called him Thursday to tell him about their homes being shaken by the loud booms, which occur when air pressure builds from planes traveling faster than the speed of sound, about 750 mph.

Some complained, Brooks said, but most were just interested in what the Navy was up to.

"I can't even really call them complaints," Brooks said. "Most people said they had heard these booms before, but not in a while, so they were curious as to what happened."

Brooks said he immediately called base air traffic controllers to determine where the planes were flying to create the boom.

Brooks said if the planes were flying closer than 30 miles from land and below 30,000 feet, the Federal Aviation Administration could issue warnings.

However, he found out the planes were in the right spot and that weather was the real culprit.

"According to meteorologists, they kept track of some high pressure and low humidity," Brooks said. "It's unusual for those types of noises to travel that far, so the conditions have to be quite good."

However, Brooks said the quantity of planes in the air also could've contributed. Air Force F-15s and Navy F/A-18 Hornets were participating in supersonic dogfights at about 40,000 feet.

Brooks said these booms do happen occasionally, especially during supersonic training and air shows like the one in November, but he encourages residents to call and report the noises so they can control them better in the future.

"If you call me with a noise report, I'm going to check it out," Brooks said. "We are good neighbors, and we want to keep flying down here for a long time."

Brooks and the Navy public affairs office can be reached at 293-2425.

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