



# 178th FIGHTER WING FACT SHEET



## LOW-ALTITUDE FLYING

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### Low-Altitude Flying Training

The Federal Aviation Administration manages U.S. airspace and is responsible for the development and enforcement of rules for aircraft flights and for the safe and efficient use of airspace. Full consideration is given to the needs of both national defense and civilian aviation.

#### Safety and Noise

The U.S. Air Force is committed to safety and to minimizing the collateral noise associated with low-level flying training. It has set numerous restrictions and tailored its training to reduce noise as much as possible.

Both the military and general aviation — pleasure and small business planes — must take precautions in designated low-altitude airspace. Pilots should know whether they can enter, where they may fly and whether their flight will be under visual or instrument flight rules. Military training areas and routes are shown in Flight Information Publications and FAA charts. Flight service stations have Department of Defense and sectional charts, the Airman's Information Manual, and other material which publicize the areas.

The Air Force takes very seriously noise problems associated with low-altitude training. For example, most low-level flying is limited to daylight hours and low-level flying near densely populated areas is prohibited.

#### Sharing Low-Altitude Airspace

The military uses some airspace below 10,000 feet for training operations and frequently flies at speeds of more than 250 knots. High speed operations include aircraft intercepts, air-to-air combat, close-air support for ground forces and photo reconnaissance. The mixture of fast military planes and slower civilian aircraft creates obvious low-altitude training safety concerns.

Training areas were first assigned to the Air Force in the late 1950s when aircraft were slower, turning patterns were tighter and low-level flying was not considered a useful tactic. Today's technology, both ours and that of potential foes, has taken flight beyond the range and scope for which those original training areas were designed.

Charted airspace includes the various types of low-altitude airspace used for military flight activities and is indicated on most aeronautical charts. High speed low-altitude training activities are conducted only in limited, charted airspace. Exceptions are made when absolutely required and are announced in advance.

In a world of increasingly sophisticated air defenses, the United States needs to maintain a first-class air force. In combat, many aircraft will operate at altitudes as low as 100 feet and at high airspeeds to defeat ground missile radars and avoid sophisticated surface-to-air missiles, anti-aircraft artillery, and enemy fighters. Pilots must have long hours of realistic training to become skilled at low-altitude flight; and then must have many more hours of the same training to remain proficient. Low-altitude flying training provides this realism and is considered one of the Air Force's highest training priorities.

## **Low-level airspace used for military flight activities includes:**

**Alert Areas** — airspace which may contain a high volume of pilot training activity or an unusual type of aerial activity, neither of which is hazardous to aircraft. They are depicted on aeronautical charts for information to non-participating pilots:

**Military Operations Area** — airspace designated for non-hazardous military activity such as acrobatics, air combat tactics and formation training. The designation informs and segregates non-participating instrument flight rules aircraft from the activity. Visual flight rules aircraft are not restricted from operating in military operations areas.

**Restricted Area** — airspace designated for hazardous military activities including live-firing of weapons. Restrictions are placed on all non-participating air traffic.

**Warning Area** — international airspace designated for military activities. Although activities may be hazardous, international agreements do not provide for prohibition of flight in international airspace.

**Military Training Routes** — for military flight training at airspeeds in excess of 250 knots. There are two types of military training routes:

**Instrument Flight Rules** — for low-altitude navigation and tactical training below 10,000 feet and at airspeeds in excess of 250 knots at night and in foul weather.

**Visual Flight Rules** — for low-altitude navigation and tactical training below 10,000 feet at airspeeds in excess of 250 knots under visual flight rules.

The FAA and DOD have worked out rules for low-altitude, high-speed training to ensure the greatest safety for both military and general aviation. The military, in addition to following its own flying rules on low-level altitudes and airspeed, also follows those in Federal Aviation Regulation 91.79 which states that no plane may fly closer than “500 feet from any person, vessel, vehicle or structure.”

## **Public Involvement**

The Air Force welcomes public reports of suspected flight violations. Citizens may call or write to flight operations or public affairs offices at their nearest Air Force base. Those who call or write should provide date and time of incident, any aircraft markings, the number and location of the plane’s engines, its approximate altitude, and the direction it was flying.

### **Point of Contact**

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