

# US fighter jet strafes school in New Jersey

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A National Guard F-16 fighter jet strafed an elementary school in Little Egg Harbor, New Jersey on November 3. About 25 lead 20-mm bullets struck the school and its surrounding property, many smashing through the roof and into classrooms, causing dangerous debris to fall. Fortunately, the school was not in session at the time and the custodians working in the building were unharmed.

On a normal school day, 940 students from third to sixth grades attend Little Egg Harbor Intermediary School. The intended target of the night strafing exercise was in the Warren Grove firing range, 3.5 miles away from the school.

The proximity to the firing range has long been a cause for anxiety among the community's residents. Mike Dupuis, president of the local board of education, told the Associated Press that both parents and school employees are concerned about the bombing runs at Warren Grove.

"Being so close to the range, that's always in the back of our minds," he said. "It is very scary. I have children in that school and relatives that work there."

The local newspaper, the *Asbury Park Press*, described the daily impact of the military exercises: "The sound of jet engines and growling machine guns carries for miles over nearby towns. Southern Ocean County residents are all too familiar with the shudder of windows and picture frames—a result of the vibration generated by the backwash of low-flying F-16 fighters and A-10 ground attack aircraft."

Helicopters and fighter jets fired at Warren Grove in 3,700 missions over the past 13 months alone. This is not the first incident involving wayward munitions affecting the communities surrounding the firing range. In 1999, a bomb falling outside the range ignited an 11,000-acre forest fire, and another bomb, in 2001, scorched 1,600 more acres. In 2002, a fighter jet from the 177th Fighter Wing crashed near a major highway

after a bombing run to Warren Grove.

The Washington, DC National Guard has kept the identity of the pilot secret, and provided no official explanation for why he opened up on the school with the plane's M61-A1 Vulcan cannon.

This incident—a well-publicized embarrassment for the US military—had broader significance on two fronts. First, it debunks the Pentagon's claims about its "precision weapons" used in Iraq and elsewhere around the world. If a school can be hit in a training exercise in the US, one can well imagine how many schools, hospitals and homes have been struck by bombs, shells and missiles supposedly aimed at precise targets in Iraqi cities.

In this case, it is impossible for the Pentagon to pass off the Little Egg Harbor Intermediary School as a terrorist hideout, the common practice in justifying indiscriminate bombings of residential neighborhoods in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In addition, the strafing of the school points to the growing dangers that the militarization of US society poses to the American people themselves. The callous indifference to the slaughter of civilians in Iraqis is creating a mindset within the US military command that must inevitably spill over to their attitude towards civilians in the US itself.

In the context of a global "war on terror"—which is also directed against perceived domestic enemies of the government and has involved preparations for the use of the military within the US—this incident has ominous implications.



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