

In From the Cold

MUSINGS ON LIFE, LOVE, POLITICS, MILITARY AFFAIRS, THE MEDIA, THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY AND JUST ABOUT ANYTHING ELSE THAT CAPTURES OUR INTEREST

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2007

Getting Rid of Warren Grove

Almost four months ago, a fire at the Air Force's Warren Grove Bombing Range in southern New Jersey scorched more than 13,000 acres. The blaze was triggered when an F-16 from the state's Air National Guard unit in Atlantic City accidentally dropped a flare in dry woodlands. It was the third fire at the range in the last eight years, and led to renewed calls for closing Warren Grove--the only range facility of its type in the mid-Atlantic states.

And quite predictably, New Jersey's Democratic politicians have leading the campaign to shut down the range--or limit operations so severely that the Air Force will be forced to close the facility. In late May, [Governor Jon Corzine said it would be a "hard sell" to convince him that the range should remain open.](#) "We're kind of in the 'three-strikes-and-you're-out' zone" he told *The New York Times*.

Now, New Jersey Senators Frank Lautenberg and Robert Menendez have tacked on an amendment to the latest defense spending bill, mandating a study of how the range interacts with the surrounding communities. Anyone want to venture a guess on the the study's bottom line? Lautenberg's latest comments suggest that his mind is already made up; as he told the Associated Press:

"The Guard must work to improve safety conditions at Warren Grove," Sen. Frank Lautenberg said. "It is vital we do everything in our power to ensure that the Guard becomes a better neighbor and improves safety at the range."

As we've noted in previous posts, brush fires are an almost inevitable consequence of operations at Warren Grove--or any other bombing range. But the potential closing of the New Jersey range raises other issues, which the state's Democratic leaders have conveniently side-stepped. [If Warren Grove shuts down, where will ANG A-10 and F-16 pilots train?](#) The Air Force operates a large bombing range in Dare County, North

Carolina, but using that facility would mean longer transit flights, higher fuel costs--and less time for air-to-ground combat training.

New Jersey Democrats also ignore the fact that the range has been a good neighbor for a number of years, providing jobs and revenue for Ocean County, and paying damage claims when accidents occur. The Air Force has already promised to compensate property owners who suffered losses in the latest fire, and that raises a troubling question about how business gets done in the Garden State.

According to media reports, the May fire destroyed four homes at a pair of retiree complexes when flames spread beyond the range. Thirty-seven other homes received lesser damage, along with timber acreage and other commercial property. So far, the Pentagon has received 161 claims for damages from the fire, totaling \$200 million. The largest individual claim (from a local mining company) alleges \$197 million in damages.

We understand that New Jersey real estate can be pricey, but those claims strike us as exaggerated. It would appear that some of Warren Grove's "neighbors" want to take the Air Force for a little ride, realizing that the military will almost certainly write them a check, in hopes of keeping the range open.

It's unfortunate when a bombing range fire causes damages outside its boundaries, interrupting the lives of local residents. But it's equally unfortunate when the purported "victims" file big damage claims, hoping to soak the government for every possible dime. But you won't see Governor Corzine and Senators Lautenberg and Menendez complaining about that. After all, the same folks filing those claims also vote in New Jersey elections and write contribution checks to their re-election campaigns.

The Democratic strategy on Warren Grove is very clear. Get rid of the range, and give the property owners whatever they want, courtesy of the U.S. Treasury. Military training and readiness? Not in their backyard.

Labels: [Frank Lautenberg](#); [Jon Corzine](#); [Robert Menendez](#); [Warren Grove bombing range](#)

POSTED BY SPOOK86 AT 9:12 AM 

5 COMMENTS :

 B.C. said...

The good folks at Warren Grove could take a page from the play book, and try to emulate the incredible work, of the good folks at [Avon Park Air Force Range](#).

Being a former Air Force "spook", myself, and a prescribed burning manager in this life, keeping our

pilots trained to the best of their abilities, while also maintaining the health of ecosystems (and ensuring & enhancing the safety of the public as a very important side benefit), is something that is near and dear to my heart.

"Some of the best remaining examples of fire-maintained, southeastern coastal plain ecosystems (pitcher plant seeps, longleaf pine savannas, cutthroat grass communities, and prairies) are found on military bases in and adjacent to artillery ranges where frequent fires are assured and unexploded ordnance provides protection from development. Frequent ordnance-ignited wildfires in aerial bombing and gunnery ranges on APAFR sustain the natural vegetation of several globally rare plant community types. Through planning and integration of ecosystem management with the military mission APAFR perpetuates these communities within the context of the military mission."

11:09 AM

 Spook86 said...

B.C.--Thanks for the illuminating reply. Just wondering if you happen to know the number of "accidental" range fires at Avon Park over the past decade. Obviously, Avon Park is more isolated than Warren Grove, and "spillover" damage is less of a consideration. However, accidental fires are a hazard on any range, something range managers and local residents learn to live with and protect against.

BTW, one of my early AF assignments was at Moody AFB in southern Georgia during the F-4 era; our crews routinely flew to Avon Park for training. The combination of the range and the low-level routes in Florida was simply unbeatable for realistic training. Sadly, political hacks like Corzine, Lautenberg and Menendez will use mishaps like the one at Warren Grove to shutter a valuable facility, and make combat training that much more difficult.

11:25 AM

 Frank said...

I'm a Jersey boy and I have to point out an error. You end your article with...

"The Democratic strategy on Warren Grove is very clear. Get rid of the range, and give the property owners whatever they want, courtesy of the U.S. Treasury. Military training and readiness? Not in their backyard."

It probably should say...

"The Democratic strategy on Warren Grove is very clear. Get rid of the range, and give the **developers and mining companies who payoff these politicians what they want courtesy of the U.S. Treasury. In the guise of helping protect the citizens from the big dangerous bombing range that threatens them and their families.**"

2:18 PM

 B.C. said...

spook, I'll check to see if I can find anything on the number of accidental fires at Avon Park. A cursory Google search didn't seem very promising, but I'll try to research it a little more in-depth later on today. (*I'm helping to get stuff ready for the wife & daughter to go Girl Scout camping later this afternoon.*)

As a note for later discussion, much of the prescribed burning I do in my job is in the "Wildland/Urban interface" here in Florida.

Done under the proper guidance and conditions, much, if not all, of the vegetation along the perimeter of the Warren Grove bombing range could be burned on a regular basis to prevent the dangerous build-up fuels. Areas that couldn't be burned, for whatever reasons, could be mechanically treated to install fire breaks and prevent other fires, be they intentional or accidental, from leaving the range and damaging private or public property.

As I said before, I'll try to find any info on Avon Park's accidental fires later on.

2:36 PM

 S.W. said...

“Done under the proper guidance and conditions, much, if not all, of the vegetation along the perimeter of the Warren Grove bombing range could be burned on a regular basis to prevent the dangerous build-up fuels.”

Hey were on to some thing here, thanks B.C.

BUT, and it's a big BUT, it's up the N.J. Forest Fire Service to conduct the controlled burning and here lies our main problem with this fire. Now, having lived in the town that was affected by the fire for about 25 years, as my memory can recall. There has never been a fire or controlled burn in this patch of woods. From talking to some of the old-timer's of the town it's been 35 or more years that they can recall a fire in that section of our town.

As for who owns the land that was burned from this fire, it is for the most part a mix of town and state own land. Now who is responsible for the controlled burning if there was going to be any on that type of land. The state is, as much as I can gather. I must also add in that the head individual for the Forest Fire Service in this area has been and always was very reluctant of having controlled fires with out the right mix of wind, dew point, temp, and staffing for the fire.

So what you end up with is the perfect situation of the lack of over site, lack of willingness to conduct, and a long growth time of the forest all combining to create the fire on the magnitude that we seen with this fire. The hammer has come down very hard on the staff at the range for this fire and

not the other agencies that also have had a much larger hand in creating this situation.

My question to the elected officials of the state is, what are you doing to improve the safety conditions of the residents of the state when it comes to the forest and there potential to burn out of control? I like Senators Frank Lautenberg, Robert Menendez and Gov Corzine I have already made up my mind. NOTHING.

What we have now have at the end of the day is nothing more then a pony show ever year for the elected official to point blame at the DOD for there lack of ability to mitigate and control the risk of fire on land that is out of the controls of there hands.

3:33 PM

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CONTRIBUTORS

In From the Cold: Getting Rid of Warren Grove

SPOOK86

GEORGE SMILEY



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