

THE USAF UPPER HEYFORD STORY: 2



1970 to 1981

- 1970
September The Oxford Times (below) reports a protest from the parish council and school regarding the noise from the new Super Sabre jets.

- The F-111 jets arrive, making it "the largest fighter base in Europe". The new jets are considerably noisier than any previous aeroplanes used by the USAF. Pilots are advised to avoid overflying Steeple Aston.

- 1974 USAF adopt new noise abatement path for take-off. Jets will no longer fly over the village but on a line between Steeple and Middle Aston, roughly over the chicken farm. This becomes known as the "Chicken Run".

- 1976 Rate reduction of £10 announced to compensate for noise.

- 1979 Three planes lost over Scotland, Boston and above sea near Hull. 6 crew perish.

- 1981 F-111 crashes on base during take-off.



August 1974
SAL reports a Parish Meeting held in response to public feeling that the jets are not sticking to the "Chicken Run" flight path. It is attended by three Base officers and a MoD liaison officer. Deputy Base Commander Colonel Anderson admits some failings but says "It's better one of ours flying over than one of theirs". Strong feelings are expressed, particularly about the noise over the school. Colonel Anderson says he cannot promise anything but will do what he can to alleviate the noise problem.

January 1975
Meeting with PC representatives and "several" colonels from the base who explain that there needs to be 20,000 hours of flying each year, amounting to 35 flights per day. They assert that they will usually follow agreements about flight path and timing but reserve the right to alter them in the interests of safety. The Base requests villages let them know about important scheduled events at the church and school such as funerals and concerts.

March 1975. Master Sargeant Tilson of 18 Bradshaw Close is appointed liaison officer.

1976
SAL carries letters and notices of families returning to the U.S and appreciative of their time in SA and the UK.

September 1978
A letter from Alan Pattinson (extracts from it, right) states that there is a "conspiracy of silence" about the true nuisance of the Base. Several letters, mostly critical of his view, supporting NATO and outlining the benefits of the Base to the area, appear in the October edition.

November 1981
SAL reports that PC requests "some form of compensation (insulation, more rate reduction) for the increased noise over the last two years.

When we purchased our cottage in this beautiful village in 1976, we were assured by the air base that Steeple Aston was not in the flight path; we were told by the previous occupants that they "hardly noticed", by a few others that it was not a problem. Had we known the truth, we should have not made our purchase. As it is, because we are foolishly honest, we should feel obliged to tell a prospective buyer that we find regular low-flying aircraft over Paines Hill nerve wracking, and in consequence, we shall lose on any sale we care to make. How is it that houses in the village do sell for decent prices if there is not a conspiracy of silence?

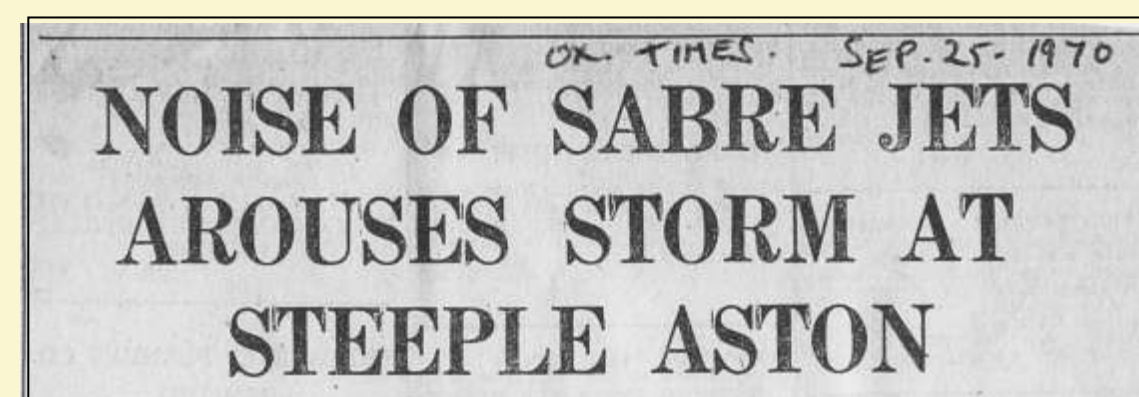
What is needed is a serious appraisal of the situation by all members of the village; there should be serious protest, articulated in the national press, local papers and television. We should refuse to pay our rates until such time the nuisance ceases or we get real compensation for the grave nuisance by a reduction of something in the region of 20 to 30%. For myself, I do not think we should accept invitations to tour the air base and drink with "avuncular squadron leaders" as if we were all friends together, sharing a local amenity called the U.S.A.F. base.

I wonder what the Queen's Regulations say about ownership of air space? It occurs to me that we should purchase a village barrage balloon, suitably decorated, to float at three hundred feet above the houses in Paines Hill which suffer most. I offer my garden as its base.

(Signed) Alan L. Pattinson.

NOTE: On Monday, Tuesday & Wednesday July 31st - August 2nd, fighter aircraft flew consistently at low altitude over Steeple Aston. The air base spokeswoman said she was as much in the dark as I was. We live in dark ages.

(A.L.P.)



The peace and quiet of Steeple Aston is being shattered by what villagers describe as "the aural battering of the Super Sabre jets" from the USAF base, Upper Heyford. So incensed are the parish council and villagers that they have protested to the base and to Mr Neil Marten, MP for North Oxfordshire. Banbury Rural District Council decided on Thursday week to support them after Dr Gillian Duncan had spoken of "the intolerable noise from the base" and produced letters of complaint she had received from villagers.

1972 Air show at Upper Heyford



US service personnel at the base in 1968



Bomb delivery, and (below) B-52s in 1979

