

Sonic Booms Caused by Test Flights



The Warner Robins Air Logistics Complex has worldwide management and engineering responsibility for the repair, modification, and overhaul of the F-15 Eagle, C-5 Galaxy, and C-130 Hercules. In addition, the WR-ALC also modifies the C-17 Globemaster III with current updates working in tandem with Lockheed-Martin Corporation.

Following repair or modification, pilots of the 339th Flight Test Squadron test these aircraft. Test flights of the C-5 and C-130 occur regularly, but Middle Georgians rarely know about them. The F-15 flight tests however are another story.

The first F-15 arrived at Robins May 30, 1975. Later, flight testing of F-15s began on an approved test route. The route known as "Macon Echo route" is flown by the F-15 taking it over Middle Georgia. For a more detailed map see flight map of Macon Echo route. Test procedures require the aircraft to be flown supersonic or faster than the speed of sound. The supersonic run is flown west to east and results in the aircraft breaking the speed of sound, causing a "sonic boom" on one stretch of the test route. It begins east of Columbus, GA and ends just west of Eastman, GA. The sonic boom occurs only once, but the sound is dragged from the beginning of the run to the end and is heard throughout Middle Georgia. To minimize the effect of the "boom" the aircraft fly at a minimum of 39,000 feet or higher. That is over 7 miles up.

Safety always comes first for the pilot and the aircraft. During the flight tests, the pilot must have visibility of a recovery base because during the check, there may be intentional engine shutdowns, generators may be taken off line, and gyros slewed.

Sonic booms on occasion cause minor damage. If you feel a sonic boom has caused damage to your property or if you would like to report a low flying aircraft, you may contact the 78th Air Base Wing Office of Public Affairs at 478-926-2137. Make sure you have all the details such as the date, time of day the incident occurred, and extent of damage if any was caused.