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## **Two Navy jets cause sonic booms, surprise residents**

BRIAN HAAS

Herald Staff Writer

MANATEE - Sonic booms startled residents Friday evening across the county as two Navy fighter jets streaked toward MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa.

It was just before 8 p.m. when Kerstin Gianniotes' walls started shaking at her home near Manatee High School.

"It sounded a lot like the space shuttle. I knew it wasn't a space shuttle," Gianniotes said. "My dog got really scared and jumped up on the couch. He's a German shepherd."

Around the same time, several miles east in Greenfield Plantation on State Road 64, Donald Heling thought he was experiencing an earthquake.

"I was just watching TV and the house just shook for a long period of time. It just didn't seem like a sonic boom. I ended up calling my neighbor," Heling said. "We weren't sure about earthquakes in this area."

The booms were caused by two Navy F-18 Hornets flying from Pensacola, said 2nd Lt. Larry van der Oord at MacDill Air Force Base. The two jets landed around 8 p.m. and the booms could be heard from Citrus to Manatee counties.

"The F-18 is a twin-engine jet, and I know it is a fast jet and very capable of breaking the sound barrier," he said. "They (residents) shouldn't worry, everything is fine."

Emergency dispatchers in Manatee County also received calls from residents reporting the boom. The jets are scheduled to leave possibly by Sunday, so more booms are possible.

The MacDill spokesman called the F-18s' arrival a "routine landing" but didn't know how fast they were flying or how low to the ground they were upon approach.

The shaking registered on the U.S. Geological Survey seismograph in Orlando, measuring 2.7 on the Richter Scale, the equivalent of a very weak earthquake. Central

Florida is not an active earthquake area, said USGS duty officer Madeleine Zirbes. "They did see it register," Zirbes said from Denver, Colo. "They thought immediately that it could be a sonic boom."

Earlier Friday evening, a security worker at Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport acknowledged that at least one Navy cargo plane performed maneuvers in the area and landed at the airport. More details were not available Friday night.

Not every aerial phenomenon has been explained away so easily, though.

On June 16, 2003, Manatee County experienced a similar boom. The military disavowed any knowledge of aircraft in the area and that boom remains a mystery.

Material from the St. Petersburg Times was used in this report. Brian Haas, criminal justice reporter, can be reached at 748-0411, ext. 7024, or at [bhaas@HeraldToday.com](mailto:bhaas@HeraldToday.com).