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PUERTO RICO

# Navy: Human error to blame in Sanes' death

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LOCAL NEWS

# Navy report: Human error to blame

## Officials reach conclusion on cause of Sanes' death

By JOHN MCPHAUL  
Of the STAR Staff

Pilot error and mistakes by a ground control officer were to blame for the April 19 death of civilian security guard David Sanes Rodríguez at the Navy's Vieques target range, the Navy reported Monday.

The ground control officer authorized the Marine Corps pilot flying an F/A-18 Hornet jet to drop his two 500-pound bombs without having visual contact with the aircraft, in violation of regulations, said Capt. Stevens Shegurd, commanding officer of the Atlantic Fleet Weapons Training facility.

The pilot, in turn, mistakenly targeted the observation post after losing track of changes he made to the aircraft's targeting designation system following previous unsuccessful bombing runs, said Shegurd.

"What you had here was that two people made terrible mistakes," said Capt. James Stark, commanding officer of Roosevelt Roads Naval Station. "There was no willful misconduct on the part of either of those individuals."

Sanes Rodríguez bled to death from a massive wound to the femoral artery in the leg, likely resulting from shrapnel or rocks blasted up from the explosion, said Roosevelt Roads Naval Station spokesman Robert Nelson.

The blast also broke Sanes Rodríguez's shoulder and knocked him unconscious. He died very quickly, said Nelson.

Citing privacy reasons, Navy officials declined to identify either the 26-year-old pilot or the ground control officer, a veteran chief petty officer who had overseen some 1,000 bombing runs at the range, said Shegurd.

The chief petty officer, subsequently transferred out of Vieques, received a "non-punitive" letter of reprimand and could be subject to further disciplinary action, he said.

The pilot's fate is in the hands of the Commanding General of Second Marine Aircraft wing, who could order no disciplinary action or punishment up to and including a court martial, said Lt. David Wunder, a staff judge advocate from the Marine Corps air station in Cherry Point, N.C.



James Stark, commander of Roosevelt Roads Naval Base in Ceiba, points Monday to a chart of the Vieques live impact range during a news conference where the Navy released their report on David Sanes' April 19 accidental death.

## Vieques activists continue fight for Navy's ouster despite its admission of guilt

By STAR Staff and wire reports

Political sectors and representatives from Vieques said they would continue to fight for the exit of the Navy from the island.

The identities of the officers were not revealed.

Portaleza Chief of Staff Angel Morey said he had not read the Navy's report but said media reports confirmed the Navy's need.

These practices are for the people of Vieques," he said.

He said he plans to attend a news conference in Washington next Wednesday with Hispanic congressional officials in front of

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Stark presented a copy of the report to Sanes Rodríguez's family on Vieques Sunday.

"They responded in a quiet, dignified manner," he said.

According to a report issued by the Navy, a series of mishaps led to the pilot dropping his bombs on the hill-top observation post, where Sanes Rodríguez and a team of spotters watched the training exercise, 1.4 miles away from the target he thought he was shooting for.

A contributing factor in the accident was partly cloudy skies which made it difficult for the pilot and the pilot of a second F/A-18 engaged in the training mission to see their targets, the report said.

"The pilot was having difficulty seeing through the scattered clouds," said Stark.

According to the report, prepared by the Navy's Judge Advocate General's office — which conducted the investigation — the aircraft approached the target range from the north to conduct an overflight.

On the subsequent first bombing run, the aircraft swooped down in tandem, but could not spot their targets through the clouds, so did not drop their ordnance.

The two pilots communicated over a tactical radio frequency not monitored by the ground control officer, agreeing to split up for individual attacks for their subsequent bombing runs.

The lead pilot, not the pilot who ultimately dropped the fatal bomb, notified the ground control officer that the pilots would have to "pick and choose" their targets for the second run, but did not specifically say they were splitting up.

On the second bombing run, the lead pilot dropped one of his 500 pound bombs.

The other pilot moved the target designation on his radar assisted "heads up display" to a target to the west of his initial target, but again could not spot his mark through the clouds and did not drop a bomb.

James Stark, commander of Roosevelt Roads Naval Base in Ceiba, points Monday to a chart of Vieques live impact range during a news conference where the Navy released their report on Da Sanes' April 19 accidental death.

STAR photo by Humberto Trias

## Vieques activists continue fight for Navy's ouster despite its admission of guilt

By STAR Staff and wire reports

Political sectors and representatives from Vieques said they would continue to fight for the exit of the Navy from the island municipality despite the Navy's taking full blame for the April 19 death of civilian security guard David Sanes Rodríguez.

In a report issued Monday at the Roosevelt Roads Naval Base in Ceiba, Navy officials said Sanes Rodríguez died after he was hit by fragments of a projectile fired during a military exercise.

The Navy blamed the pilot of the F/A-18 Hornet jetfighter and another military officer located in an observation point for Sanes Rodríguez's death.

The identities of the officers were not revealed.

Fortaleza Chief of Staff Angel Morey said he had not read the Navy's report but said media reports confirmed the Navy's negligence in conducting military exercises.

"Vieques is more complex than the death of [Sanes Rodríguez] and the government should not be happy with the report because it reiterates that there was negligence," Morey said.

Popular Democratic Party Vice President Anibal Acevedo Vilá said the Navy's admission was an "inescapable conclusion."

"The report's admission that two human errors caused the death of [Sanes Rodríguez] is clear proof of how dangerous and harmful

these practices are for the people of Vieques," he said.

He said he plans to attend news conference in Washington next Wednesday with Hispanic congressional officials in front of the Capitol to demand the Navy withdrawal from Vieques.

"The Navy could guarantee a situation would not happen again and demonstrate its honest contrition for its original actions and immoral conduct by simply getting the hell out of Vieques, cleaning the environment and returning Vieques to Puerto Rico," said Manuel Rodríguez Collana, the Puerto Rican Independence Party's secretary of North American Affairs.

At this point, the spotters at the observation post were still under the impression that the F/A-18s were still flying in tandem.

On the third and fatal bombing run, the ground control officer spotted the lead aircraft and authorized him to drop his remaining bomb, watching as the bomb fell.

Anticipating that the second F/A-18 was following the first, but without actually seeing the aircraft, the ground control officer responded to a request from the second pilot to drop his bombs in the affirmative.

In the meantime, the pilot had forgotten that he had changed his target designation to a target further west after his first run, and shifted to the west a second time, mistakenly targeting the observation post.

"The critical error made by the pilot . . . was his failure to remember that he had moved his target designation during his second run," said the report.

According to the report, the ground control officer should

have been alerted to the fact that the pilots were flying separately given that each pilot was communicating individually with the ground, something that would not normally occur during a tandem run.

"By responding to the [pilots] individually the [officer] gave the pilots the impression that he was providing individual control and understood that the attack runs were not in [tandem]," said the report.

The report suggests that the ground control officer have been relying on a second spotter at his side who was pointing in the direction of where he anticipated the jet would come from and mistaking that gesture for visual contact.

Instead the F/A-18 dove from an altitude of 8,700 feet at a speed of 550 mph directly over the observation post, dropping two bombs about 50 feet on either side of a hurricane locker upon which Sanes Rodríguez was apparently watching the bombing exercises.

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## EDITORIAL

# More accidents wait to happen in Vieques

**H**uman error was responsible for the deadly accident April 19 that killed Vieques civilian David Sanes Rodriguez and wounded four others, and the only way to prevent other such future errors on a Navy firing range wedged close-by more than 9,000 Vieques civilians is to cease military maneuvers.

The Navy released Monday the results of its official investigation into the April incident, placing blame on the 26-year-old pilot of an F-18 fighter plane, and a ground control officer, who did not coordinate properly on a live bombing run. Consequently, two 500 pound bombs were dropped 1.4 miles off target on an observation post within the firing range, resulting in Sanes' death.

There is little room, if any, for error when jet fighter planes are traveling at 550 miles per hour and descending through clouds from 8,700 feet to 2,500 feet in a brief period of time to hit a target, as was the plane that went astray.

It is when one reads a report like the one released Monday that the cold realization of the dangers to a very nearby civilian population sets in. From where David Sanes died instantly to the fence line where civilian life begins is from seven to nine miles, depending on the exact location. At the speeds the jet fighters travel, it would not take much more of a deviation for a greater tragedy.

# Expect the worst on billboard legislation

**T**here's yet another billboard regulation bill awaiting Gov. Rosselló's signature that couldn't be more favorable to the billboard industry and those who use them unless it was written by them. And maybe it was.

The purpose of the new legislation, the prologue states, is to eliminate the irrational and obsolete restrictions that limit the effective

# Insulted? Fine, but the cowards

By MYRIAM MARQUEZ  
The Orlando Sentinel

**W**e're insulted at the thought that anyone — much less an American — would burn Glory as a way to criticize the government in the world. Those who don't deserve to enjoy the privileges this nation affords its citizens.

We get angry when we hear racist or sexist epithets tossed about in guise of playful, harmless banter. Hate-filled people deserve our contempt.

We're appalled when others try to impose their religious beliefs on a world. What business is it of theirs?

We're outraged that television programs with violent or sexual themes air when children are a captive audience. Do those Hollywood types have no conscience?

Insulted, angry, appalled, outraged. It's enough to call a constitutional convention and do a stomping, combing dance all over the First Amendment.

At least that's what some people would like to do.

It's tempting. So tempting.

Imagine a nation where everyone is a good citizen who gets along with others and everyone thinks the same way, believes in the same things, avoids sexual, racial or religious clashes.

Imagine a nation where children are not exploited by television shows that aim to titillate or glorify violence.

A perfect world this is not a country?

Not in our lifetime. Not ever.

Will outlawing flag-burning, passing laws to punish people who say bad things, requiring a one-size-fits-all prayer in the public schools, outlawing television shows that have violent or sexual themes save us from the darker side of ourselves?

No law can do that, but at least there would be a boon to the already lucrative prison-building industry and its employees. More lawyers. More cops. More prison guards. Hey, people have to have the best of intentions. But all

have the best of intentions. But all

