



## DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

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16 May 03

From: Commander, U.S. Atlantic Fleet

To: Chief of Naval Operations

Subj: FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (FEIS) FOR THE  
INTRODUCTION OF F/A-18 E/F AIRCRAFT ON THE EAST COAST OF  
THE UNITED STATES

Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5090.1B

Encl: (1) Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the  
Introduction of the F/A-18 E/F Super Hornet Aircraft  
to the east coast of the United States

1. Per reference (a), I am forwarding enclosure (1), the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the introduction of the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet to the east coast of the United States. After an exhaustive review, I recommend that the Navy select Alternative 6, combined with a new outlying field (OLF). Alternative 6 would base eight fleet F/A-18E/F squadrons (96 aircraft) and the Fleet Replacement Squadron (FRS) (24 aircraft) at NAS Oceana, and two fleet squadrons (24 aircraft) at MCAS Cherry Point. I recommend that the OLF be located in Washington County, North Carolina.

2. Split-siting provides important population encroachment, noise, and air quality mitigation for the communities around NAS Oceana and MCAS Cherry Point. The geographic proximity of the two basing locations allows for combined use of training ranges and OLFs by all the Super Hornet squadrons, as well as other aircraft based at both NAS Oceana and MCAS Cherry Point. Alternative 6 maximizes existing facilities and limits capital investment requirements at both NAS Oceana and MCAS Cherry Point, providing substantive mitigation at an acceptable cost. Alternative 4A, which would base six fleet F/A-18E/F squadrons (72 aircraft) and the FRS (24 aircraft) at NAS Oceana, and four fleet F/A-18E/F squadrons (48 aircraft) at MCAS Cherry Point, provides some additional mitigation for NAS Oceana, but at a significant cost. MCAS Cherry Point base MILCON costs alone increase by nearly a factor of nine under Alternative 4A. Alternative 6 dictates a smaller increase in the number of intermediate maintenance and support personnel than under

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Alternative 4A. The use of existing infrastructure at both basing locations and the resultant economies of scale achieved in support, maintenance, training, and personnel requirements make Alternative 6 the best solution for Navy, the affected communities and the taxpayer.

3. I believe a new OLF in Washington County, North Carolina is required not only for support of Super Hornet operations under Alternative 6, but also for the recently announced Fleet Response Concept, and for the future operational needs of the Navy. As a result of aircraft carrier and Amphibious Readiness Group (ARG) operational requirements generated during ENDURING FREEDOM in Afghanistan and most recently IRAQI FREEDOM, the Fleet Response Concept was developed to institutionalize a continuous surge capability of up to seven carriers in reaction to world events. The new OLF will enhance the fidelity and quality of carrier landing training and provide important noise mitigation for MCAS Cherry Point and NAS Oceana. Pressure from residential encroachment around NALF Fentress has resulted in deviations from standard FCLP training. For instance, the geometry of the pattern at NALF Fentress has been modified and the pattern altitude rose to 800 feet (as opposed to 600 feet as flown at the aircraft carrier). While FCLP training will continue to be conducted at NALF Fentress, encroachment pressures are going to increase as evidenced by the 44% growth in population within a five-mile radius of NALF Fentress between 1990 and 2000. The proposed OLF will allow for FCLP training in an environment free from such limitations, thereby providing superior training for Navy and Marine Corps aircrews. Construction of an OLF also facilitates the Fleet Response Concept, allowing the Navy to mobilize forces more quickly, safely, and efficiently in response to world situations. Capacity at NALF Fentress is insufficient to accommodate FCLP requirements of more than one carrier air wing and an FRS simultaneously. An additional OLF will eliminate the need for costly and extensive measures currently required during surge operations. Easily accessible from both NAS Oceana and MCAS Cherry Point, an OLF constructed in Washington County, North Carolina will give the Navy critical operational flexibility and enhanced responsiveness to meet emergent threats to national security. While the EIS addresses Super Hornet operational requirements and their impacts, it is also apparent that future aircraft will require similar remote training sites.

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Encroachment evident on the three home basing sites considered in this document, as well as around NALF Fentress, requires the Navy to look to less-densely populated areas for its training. With its low population density, compatible land-uses, minimal environmental impact, and central location between MCAS Cherry Point and NAS Oceana, an OLF located at site C in Washington County provides the greatest potential as a valuable training asset for current and future years.

4. In order to guard against future encroachment at the proposed OLF facility, I recommend fee simple purchase of all land within the 60 DNL noise contour as outlined in the FEIS. This acquisition strategy is the only method that will guarantee encroachment-free operations and allow flexibility for the future. Fee simple purchase of all land within the 60 DNL noise contour is estimated to cost 118 million dollars. By comparison, the cost for the fee simple purchase of only the land required for the field and the purchase of restrictive easements of all remaining land within the 60 DNL noise contour is projected to be 47 million dollars. However, over time, some of the additional costs of the fee simple only acquisition strategy will be recovered through agricultural out-leasing, which is projected to generate approximately 2.5 million dollars per year. We must work in partnership with the communities surrounding our bases to ensure they understand our training needs, and how our training directly affects the nation's defense. We must also give continuing attention to the impacts of our training on these communities. Because of the Navy's commitment to be a good neighbor, we must actively seek ways to minimize negative impacts on these communities. I recommend the Navy pursue legislative relief to provide one-time compensation to Washington and other directly affected North Carolina counties for revenues lost from the county tax base because of the removal of land for the OLF project. I also recommend the Navy negotiate mutually beneficial partnerships with the affected counties to provide utility support which could provide additional mitigation to lost tax revenues.

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