



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

COMMANDER
U.S. ATLANTIC FLEET
1562 MITSCHER AVENUE, SUITE 250
NORFOLK, VA 23551-2487

18 July 2003

The Navy recently released the Final Environmental Impact Statement concerning the homebasing of east coast F/A-18 E/F Super Hornet aircraft. This statement contains a recommendation that the Navy base two new Super Hornet squadrons at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point and eight new squadrons with the Fleet Replacement Squadron at Naval Air Station Oceana, and build an Outlying Landing Field (OLF) in Washington County. I would like to offer my rationale for why this landing field is so important to the fleet.

As the Atlantic Fleet Commander, I am responsible for providing our country with trained, combat-ready naval forces. The Navy's present OLF at Fentress does not permit realistic carrier landing training due to residential growth around the airfield. Our pilots have had to adjust their flight pattern altitudes around existing homes and experience degraded night training as a result of residential lighting. The proposed OLF will allow for realistic carrier landing training in an environment free from such limitations, allowing the Navy to "train as we fight."

Additionally, the Global War on Terrorism and Operation Iraqi Freedom required that the Navy deploy on short notice - or surge - a large number of forces to respond to this threat. As a result of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the Navy is now institutionalizing surge readiness in order to meet anticipated future force demands. Existing airfields at NAS Oceana and MCAS Cherry Point and the OLF at Fentress simply do not have the capacity to meet potential future surge requirements. This surge requirement makes a second OLF prudent.

I recommended the Washington County site because of a number of carefully considered factors including location in relation to existing airfields, area population density, and prospects for future encroachment. With its low population density, compatible land uses, minimal environmental impact and central location between MCAS Cherry Point and NAS Oceana, the proposed Washington County site has far greater potential as a valuable training asset than do any of the other sites the Navy considered.

I also recommended a number of actions to help mitigate the impact of a new OLF on area residents. These actions include fee simple purchase of all land within the 60 decibel noise contour to minimize current and future noise impact of the OLF, and legislative compensation to affected counties for tax revenues lost by the land purchase. I am committed to actively seeking ways to minimize the impact of Fleet training on area communities and to pursuing mutually beneficial ventures whenever possible.

Constructing an Outlying Landing Field in Washington County is vital to our continued ability to produce the best Navy and Marine Corps pilots in the world. The men and women who fly our aircraft and who have committed their lives to our national defense need this important training facility. I ask the residents of Eastern North Carolina to support us in this important national defense need and endeavor.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Robert J. Natter".

ROBERT J. NATTER
Admiral, U.S. Navy