

**DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
U.S FLEET FORCES COMMAND**

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT FOR PROPOSED EXPEDITIONARY STRIKE GROUP COMPOSITE TRAINING UNIT EXERCISE IN NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2007 (ESG COMPTUEX (NOV/DEC 2007))

Pursuant to Council on Environmental Quality Regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508) implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act, the Navy gives notice that a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) has been issued for the ESG COMPTUEX (Nov/Dec 2007). This FONSI is based on analysis contained in a Comprehensive Environmental Assessment (EA) for Major Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises on the East and Gulf Coasts of the U.S (February 2006) and the EA for Routine Shore Fire Control Party (SFCP) Training, Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune (July 2002). The FONSI for the Comprehensive EA for Major Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises was issued on February 10, 2006 and the EA for Routine SFCP was issued August 02, 2002. An Environmental Impact Statement is not required for the proposed ESG COMPTUEX (Nov/Dec 2007).

The Comprehensive EA for Major Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises made an overall impact assessment for each of the major training exercise types and concluded that the conduct of major Atlantic Fleet training exercises will not have any significant effect on the quality of the human environment given that: these training exercises are similar in nature, scope and intensity to past major training exercises; past major exercises have not shown a significant impact on the environment either individually or cumulatively; and effective and robust mitigation measures are routinely implemented. Consistent with past practices, the Navy may conduct up to six major Atlantic Fleet training exercises annually. Major exercises include, but are not limited to, ESG COMPTUEXs, Carrier Strike Group Composite Training Unit Exercises (CSG COMPTUEXs), Joint Task Force Exercises (JTFEX), and Combined CSG COMPTUEX/JTFEXs. Specific training activities evaluated in the Comprehensive EA included air-to-ground bombing, combat search and rescue, helicopter events, amphibious landings, mine warfare exercises, gunnery exercises, and maritime interdiction operations.

The EA for Routine SFCP Training comprehensively assessed the environmental impacts associated with the potential for Naval Gun Fire (NGF) noise affecting marine mammals, the potential for ship collisions with marine mammals and the potential for NGF rounds to fall short into the water or land and strike protected species. In addition, the EA evaluated the effects on boat traffic on the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway, impact vibrations on MCB Camp Lejeune, and human safety as a result of routine SFCP training. As a result, the EA concluded there is no significant environmental impacts with respect to implementation of routine SFCP training at Camp Lejeune.

The Navy proposes to conduct ESG COMPTUEX (Nov/Dec 2007), a major Atlantic Fleet training exercise, during the months of November and December 2007. Specific training activities may include air-to-ground bombing, amphibious landings, gunnery exercises, and maritime interdiction operations. The exercise will be conducted in the Cherry Point and Charleston Operating Areas (OPAREAs) and Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. Air-to-ground bombing events will occur on the Pincastle Bombing Range in Florida.

Major Atlantic Fleet training exercises such as the ESG COMPTUEX are designed to closely approximate the emerging threats and operational conditions that U.S. Armed Forces and Allied partners could encounter during forward-deployed operations around the world. The purpose of these exercises is to certify naval forces as combat-ready. The Navy needs to train to deploy combat-ready forces as mandated by 10 U.S.C. 5062. The Carrier Strike Group (CSG) and Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG), which make up our forward-deployed naval forces, are fundamental elements of the U.S. strategic posture. These forces must be well trained to respond, at minimal personal risk to sailors, to the myriad of tasks that might confront them.

Three alternatives were considered in the Comprehensive EA for Major Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises including: (1) No Action, (2) Conduct Major Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises along the East Coast of the U.S. and Gulf of Mexico (preferred alternative), and (3) Conduct Major Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises in the Cherry Point Operating Area only. Alternatives (2) and (3) met all of the project criteria. Alternative (1) would not allow the Navy to train for combat and therefore did not meet the mandate in 10 U.S.C. 5062. Alternative (2) was identified as the preferred alternative because it gives the Navy the greatest flexibility and number of available land ranges and operating areas to accommodate all of the land-based training components as well as the number of participants involved with a major Atlantic Fleet training exercise.

Two alternative were considered in the EA for Routine SFCP Training including: (1) No Action, (2) SFCP training at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and (3) SFCP training at the Eglin Range Complex. Alternative (1) would impair the ability of the USMC to train Atlantic Fleet forces in the Atlantic Fleet operational area and to integrate the SFCP and naval ship crew training, so that Navy and Marine personnel could train together. Alternative (2) would be constrained operationally and could affect relations with the Cuban government. Finally, Alternative (3) was not feasible due to the lack of an existing suitable site for a naval gunnery range, and operational and serious safety constraints.

The Comprehensive EA for Major Atlantic Fleet Training Exercises addresses the areas where major Atlantic Fleet exercises would occur on land ranges and in waters from the shoreline to 12 NM. These included in-water OPAREAs along the East and Gulf Coasts of the U.S. in the Virginia Capes, Cherry Point, Charleston/Jacksonville, and Eastern Gulf of Mexico OPAREAs. In addition, the Comprehensive EA covered training that will occur on land ranges at: the Pinecastle and Avon Park Bombing Ranges; Eglin Air Force Base, Florida; Bombing Targets BT-9 and BT-11, Dare County Range, N-1/ BT-3 Range and training areas at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, North Carolina; and Townsend Air-to-Ground Gunnery Range, Georgia.

Environmental concerns addressed in the Comprehensive EA included land use, community facilities, coastal zone management, socioeconomic, cultural resources, airspace, air quality, noise, geology, soils, water resources, biological resources, munitions and hazardous materials management, and safety. Mitigation measures identified in the Comprehensive EA that relate to operations that will be conducted during ESG COMPTUEX (Nov/Dec 2007) will be implemented. Specifically, mitigation measures for air-to-ground bombing, amphibious landings, and gunnery exercises will be followed in order to minimize any potential for environmental impacts. Additionally, all aircraft operations and ordnance use will be consistent

with existing range manuals and related environmental documents as incorporated in the Comprehensive EA.

The Navy will also implement applicable mitigation measures during ESG COMPTUEX (Nov/Dec 2007) that were identified in the Comprehensive EA relating to previous consultations with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service. These mitigation measures were developed in order to protect threatened and endangered species and marine mammals on land ranges and off the Southeastern U.S. Therefore, no threatened or endangered species will be jeopardized and takes of marine mammals are not anticipated as a result of ESG COMPTUEX (Nov/Dec 2007) operations conducted on land ranges and in near-shore waters within 12 NM. These include general maritime mitigation measures related to vessel movements. Therefore, collisions with marine mammals or sea turtles are not expected given that these general maritime measures will be implemented.

Exercise planners and participants will be made aware of all restrictions and mitigative measures that apply to ESG COMPTUEX (Nov/Dec 2007) as identified in the Comprehensive EA. These measures will be promulgated to all participants as mandatory requirements.

Based on the information gathered during preparation of the Comprehensive EA and the evaluation of the nature, scope and intensity of the proposed ESG COMPTUEX, the Navy finds that the proposed ESG COMPTUEX is consistent with the training evaluated in the Comprehensive EA and with past training and environmental documents. Accordingly, the Navy finds that conducting ESG COMPTUEX (Nov/Dec 2007) with the implementation of mitigation measures will not significantly impact the environment.

The Comprehensive EA addressing this action is on file and may be reviewed by interested parties at the place of origin: Commander, Naval Facilities Engineering Command Atlantic, 6506 Hampton Blvd, Norfolk, VA 23508 (ATTN: Ms. Erin Swiader, Code EV21ES), telephone (757) 322-4960. A limited number of copies of the EA are available to fill single-copy requests.

25 October 2007

Dated



M. R. HARRELL
Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff
For Operational Readiness and Training
U.S. Fleet Forces Command