

# CITIZENS OF EBHEY'S RESERVE

*protecting our land, homes, and health*

July 3, 2020

Captain Matthew Army  
Naval Air Station Whidbey Island  
3730 North Charles Porter Avenue  
Oak Harbor, WA 98278-5000

Dear Captain Army,

Field carrier landing practice (FCLP) practice at Outlying Field Coupeville (OLF) on the afternoon of June 29, 2020 (about 1515 to 1700 hours) used runway #32 during a consistent southeast tailwind of about 10+ mph.<sup>1</sup> The Growler Environmental Impact Statement (EIS; page 2-3) states:

The Navy established requirements for FCLP airfields in order to ensure that FCLP realistically trains naval aviators to land on an aircraft carrier.... These requirements are crucial because landing on an aircraft carrier is perhaps the most difficult operation in military aviation.

Please explain how the pilots mitigated the exacerbated safety risks due to the higher groundspeed needed with a tailwind and on the OLF runway, which when wet, is 1100 feet short of the length needed to stop. Further, since landings/take-offs on an aircraft carrier are always into the wind, please explain how training with a 10+ mph tailwind mimics conditions Growler pilots experience on a carrier.

Practice sessions with a tailwind at OLF have been observed before, though not commonly. Very commonly observed, however, are bounces with a 10-20 mph westerly crosswind. In fact, the vast majority of the OLF spring and summer FCLPs are with winds that align roughly perpendicular to the runway. The EIS states (page 2-3), "*To be suitable for FCLP... the runway [should be] aligned with the prevailing winds.*" Because in west and southwest winds the OLF is inappropriate, please move FCLPs to a runway where pilots can actually land/takeoff into the wind--e.g., runway 17/25 at Ault Field.

Weather also constrains OLF use. In 2017 and 2018, 32% and 23% practice sessions were canceled at the OLF versus 0% and 3% at Ault Field. In an internal email Captain Moore (July 28, 2017) laments, "*In 2015/2016, 33 of 101 [one-third] scheduled OLF Coupeville fly days were*

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1 The wind prog chart showed winds from the southeast at 10-12 knots. TAF KNUW 2923/3023 15010KT 9999 FEW035 SCT180 SCT250 QNH2994INS TEMPO 2923/3001 23013G20KT FEW020 SCT035 BKN180 BKN250

*anceled--primarily for wind constraints and weather ceilings. In addition on five occasions we started at the OLF and had to move to Ault Field due to [wind constraints and weather ceilings].”* Captain Moore goes on to explain that the high cancellation rate could require more flying at OLF going into the early morning hours and initiation of flying on weekends. This would surely not bode well for NASWI.

None of this is consistent with Navy rhetoric that the OLF is a uniquely great training venue. Instead, it indicates the OLF is less than the ideal training venue promoted and that other locations would provide more realistic training. Witness, for example, this July 12, 2017, internal Navy document, which states, *“The unmodified carrier landing pattern at NAF El Centro and the unique at-sea ambient lighting and environmental conditions of nearby San Clemente Island provided higher quality of training than could be achieved at either Ault Field or Coupeville [OLF].”*

Because Growlers have to train with their fighter counterparts on the East Coast and in the Southwest (i.e., inter-operability training) that would seem to provide excellent opportunities for scheduling FCLPs in places like El Centro, mitigating deployment solely for FCLPs.

Thank you for considering needed solutions to these OLF problems and shortcomings.

Regards,

Robert Wilbur for Citizens of Ebey’s Reserve Board of Directors

cc: The Honorable Patty Murray  
The Honorable Maria Cantwell  
The Honorable Rick Larsen  
The Honorable Adam Smith  
The Honorable Jay Inslee

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