

Annex 3.5 Otterburn Training Area (OTA)

1 Suitability

Location/Distance/Accessibility

- 1.1 OTA is located within the Northumberland National Park, approximately 35 miles north-west of Newcastle. It is bounded by the A68, the principle access road, to the south and extends to the Scottish border in the north-west. The nearest rail and air services are in Newcastle.

Topography

- 1.2 The land principally consists of moor and heath, extensively grazed by sheep and cattle, with small areas of grassland in the valley bottoms. Relict ancient woodlands occur in several valleys with larger, conifer-dominated plantations in other areas. The training area is at an altitude of between 200m and 610m above sea level and can suffer from rapid and severe changes in weather conditions.

Size and Shape

- 1.3 OTA forms the major part of ATE Otterburn comprising 24,300 hectares of freehold land in Northumberland. The land is situated in one large, parcel, the majority of which is covered by military byelaws. OTA has the largest impact area in the UK.
- 1.4 The training area can accommodate a maximum of 3 company level live fire tactical exercises and two company level dray training exercises concurrently. When artillery, Apache and fighter ground attack are live firing, around 66% of the training area is closed to other uses. There are no OBUA facilities and no off road training for vehicles. OTA can house 2 battalions in camped accommodation.

Facilities

- 1.5 OTA has recently been developed as the primary artillery range in the UK and this is given the appropriate priority. It is also used for infantry field firing, support weapon firing, fighter ground attack, helicopter cannon and rocket live firing, demolitions and an All Arms Air Defence Range (small arms). There are also parachute-dropping zones.

- 1.6 Construction of the necessary infrastructure to train sustainably with the 155mm Artillery System (AS90) and the Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS) was commenced in Spring 2003. This includes:
- The provision of 46 gun spurs and associated echelon areas, which may be grouped into the equivalent of 6 Gun deployment Areas;
 - Three Technical and 18 Tactical Observation Post positions;
 - A central maintenance facility;
 - A Regimental Replenishment Point;
 - Troop accommodation;
 - A network of roads and tracks linking these various facilities and permitting movement in all weathers.
- 1.7 Due to the boggy nature of the ground, OTA is unsuitable for manoeuvre training by units equipped with heavy wheeled or tracked vehicles such as Main Battle Tanks. However a developed network of minor roads and tracks allows for excellent echelon and logistic exercises
- 1.8 Dry training can take place anywhere on OTA except when live firing takes place. In addition, land is licensed from neighbouring landowners (including the Forestry Commission) to facilitate dry training for limited periods of the year at Kielder Forest, Kidland Forest, Emlehope Moor and Kielder Water.

2 Availability

Priority

- 2.1 OTA is prioritised for Artillery live firing (AS90 and MLRS), Apache pilot qualification courses and Joint Forward Air Control Training Standards Unit (JFACTSU).
- 2.2 In addition, OTA accommodates the training of infantry recruits from the Infantry Training Centre at Catterick (phase 2 training) and the Army Foundation College (AFC) at Harrogate, together with formation training by light brigades and other dismounted infantry training.

Disruption

- 2.3 Training on OTA takes place 7 days a week and for virtually the whole of the year, except for the specified periods outlined in 2.5. The training area is not significantly disrupted by pre-operational training requirements. It receives frequent short notice requests for that are accepted on a fill up basis.

Limitations

- 2.4 The whole of ATE Otterburn is held by MOD on a freehold ownership basis. Under agreement with the National Park Authority, there are 17 non-firing days every year and no live firing is undertaken during the lambing period from 15 April to 15 May. Following the Public Inquiry in 1997 in respect of proposals to provide infrastructure for artillery training some restrictions were placed on the frequency of future artillery firing. This means that, subject to urgent pre-operational requirements, no more than 134 days per year of tracked artillery (AS90/MRLS) training (including 55 days of live firing) can be carried out at OTA.
- 2.5 The danger area may be used for the firing of all artillery, infantry and tank weapons and for the firing or dropping by aircraft of air to ground missiles. On any given day, the danger area may be in multiple uses, with a number of overlapping templates from concurrent training activities. However, it is not possible for every range facility to be in use at the same time.
- 2.6 Some dry training exercises (including use of pyrotechnics) are undertaken on around 57,000 hectares of land licensed from neighbouring landowners in the Kielder Forest and Kielder Water, for up to 80 days per year.
- 2.7 In addition, there are environmental considerations to be taken into account. OTA freehold land lies almost entirely within the boundary of Northumberland National Park, has 11 designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and has two hay meadows which are designated as part of the North Pennine Dales Meadows candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC). There are currently 62 Ancient Monuments within the training area, together with listed buildings and battlefield sites. There are 76 km of footpaths and 128km of bridleways across OTA but public access along these routes in the byelawed area is only allowed when the red flags are lowered. There are also 11km of permissive paths outside the byelawed area.

3 Available Sub Unit Training Weeks

Typical annual training programme

- 3.1 Annual training at OTA is programmed around AS90/MRLS live firing (55 days), Apache pilot qualification courses (six 2-week packages) and JFACTSU (24 days). When these training activities are being undertaken there are only limited opportunities for dry training.
- 3.2 The Infantry Training Centre at Catterick and the Army Foundation College (AFC) at Harrogate are also regular users. Both undertake live and dry tactical training exercises. In addition OTA is used regularly by NATO Forces, TA and Cadets, RN and the RAF. Over the last ten years OTA has averaged around 280,000 man training days per annum.

Availability for CP1 and CP2 light force training

- 3.3 Taking account of these existing priority commitments and the specified non-firing periods, OTA has a potential spare capacity to provide the necessary arduous training for other light force training up to CP2 (IFFC) for a maximum of 60 days per year, which assuming 3 concurrent sub unit IFFCs and 5-day training weeks would provide 36 live sub unit training weeks. It would also have potential capacity for dry tactical training of around 120 days, which assuming 2 concurrent (also with live firing) sub unit training over 5-day training weeks provides 48 sub unit dry training weeks. However, it is unlikely that all of this potential availability will be in large blocks and under Directed Training any spare capacity will primarily be utilised by units located in the north east.

4 Sources of Information

- 4.1 Details of the Otterburn Training Area contained in this Annex is drawn from the following data sources:
- ATE Otterburn : User Guide (*Limited Distribution: UK Officials are not to reveal or release this document outside UK Government Service*)
 - ATE Otterburn : Public Information Leaflet
 - RPS "Public Access Consultancy for the Army Training Estate : Regional Report ATE Otterburn" August 2003

- Military Training Component Management Plan, OTA ILMP, 2003
- Meeting with Commandant OTA on 1 February 2005