

Annex 3.8 Stanford Training Area

1 Suitability

Location/Distance/Accessibility

- 1.1 The ATE facilities at Stanford Training Area (STANTA) are located in Norfolk, some 10 kilometres north-west of Thetford.

- 1.2 There is good access via the A11 from Cambridge to Norwich and the A14 running eastwards from Ipswich.

Topography

- 1.3 STANTA comprises a lowland landscape characterised by a varied terrain comprising woodland, pine forests, lakes, marshes, a river and several streams around a central core of heathland. The peripheral areas are used for arable farming and grazing of livestock. The terrain, though not arduous, is well suited to intensive infantry training.

Size and Shape

- 1.4 The training area covers approximately 12,150 hectares. The field firing area provides for individual live firing up to advanced field firing at company level supported by mortars, artillery and fighter ground attack. It can just, with some logistical problems run 2 IFFC concurrently the training area can accommodate dry training exercises up to Brigade level. However only limited dry training is possible on the main part of the training area whilst live fire exercises are being undertaken.

Facilities

- 1.5 STANTA provides for dry training in addition to the eleven fixed ranges. Field firing includes direct weapons (rifles) and indirect fire. This has generally been restricted to mortars, although there is an increasing use by light guns taking advantage of the 12-kilometre impact area.

- 1.6 The danger area may also be used for the purposes of vehicle training, landing and take off of aircraft including helicopters, exploding demolition charges and for all activities

ancillary to such purposes. Large parachute drops are also a regular feature of training at STANTA.

- 1.7 STANTA offers a variety of supplementary training packages, including assault and confidence courses, assault pioneer training courses, urban operations village, mine laying, orienteering courses, tactical Harrier airstrip, vehicle recovery and watermanship areas.
- 1.8 The northern area is a more recent addition to the STANTA, known as the Northern Extension and in the main comprises the land north of the B1108 Watton Road. Under the terms of the planning permission this area can only be used for dry tactical training for up to 179 days per annum.
- 1.9 Permanent camp accommodation is available for 1242 at STANTA, with a further 500 at nearby Beckingham. A tented camp increases this capacity and facilitates training for the Regular and Territorial Army, cadet units from all three services, police forces and overseas forces.

2 Availability

Priority

- 2.1 STANTA is prioritised for low intensity conflict operational training (OPTAG) for units deploying to Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia and Northern Ireland etc. It also has a high priority for training by 16 Air Assault Brigade based at Colchester, the RMAS and the training wing of RAF Honnington.

Disruption

- 2.2 As STANTA is already prioritised for pre-operational training, the annual training programme takes account of these pre-existing requirements.

Limitations

- 2.3 Most of the STANTA estate is held on a freehold basis by MoD, with around 780 hectares held on leasehold tenure and 1435 hectares used under licence. The only restriction on live firing is for the 6-week lambing period during March and April.

- 2.4 Forest Enterprise owns some of the forest within training area. The MOD has training rights over this land, but no management responsibility. There are restrictions on training in these areas including prohibited use of blank ammunitions and tracked vehicles.
- 2.5 Live firing necessarily restricts the scope of dry training. The close-country, fragile sandy soil and marsh severely restricts the use of tracked vehicles and there is limited scope for artillery deployment. During operational training exercises the whole of the training area is out of bounds to other users and the edge of the training area becomes the edge of the danger area.
- 2.6 Within the central heathland core there are ten SSSIs covering around 6800 hectares, the largest single ownership in lowland Britain. The majority of this area is part of the Breckland cSAC and the proposed SPA and comprises one of the most extensive areas of lowland heath remaining in Britain. There are also significant archaeological remains, including 26 Scheduled Ancient Monuments, all of which are protected.
- 2.7 Generally only restricted public access is possible to the main training area on safety (live shells and mortar bombs are found regularly during clearance operations) and operational grounds. A permissive path has been sited in the Northern Extension with access restricted when the red flags are flying.

3 Available Sub Unit Training Weeks

Typical annual training programme

- 3.1 STANTA is open for 355 days each year and is one of the most extensively used training areas in the UK. On average approximately 100,000 troops use the area annually, totalling around 400,000 man training days.
- 3.2 Central to the annual training programme are OPTAG exercises, which utilise the whole training area for at least 15 weeks. There is also increasing use by 16 Air Assault Brigade, who book on average of 36 weeks for dry training effectively closing all live firing ranges. RAF Honnington also runs regular courses.

Availability for CP1 & CP2 light force training

- 3.3 STANTA is under continuous pressure to provide additional training and presently accommodates some of the training that SPTA is unable to accept. Taking account of existing priorities and limitations there is limited availability for live fire tactical training of 19 sub unit training weeks with the possibility of running two sub unit live fire exercises concurrently providing 38 live fire sub unit training weeks per annum. Concurrent with live fire training it is possible to undertake 152 dry tactical training sub unit weeks in total. However, this potential availability tends not to be in weeks but is generally single days and is therefore presently used by local units.
- 3.4 Consequently, whilst STANTA could therefore meet a proportion of the new requirement for CP1 training for CA, CS and CSS units, it will be of limited utility for any additional CP2 training. In any event under Directed Training units based in the east of England will use any spare capacity.

4 Sources of Information

- 4.1 Details of the Stanford Training Area contained in this Annex is drawn from the following data sources:
- ATE East : User Guide
 - ATE East : Public Information Leaflet
 - RPS "*Public Access Consultancy for the Army Training Estate : Regional Report ATE East*" September 2003
 - Meeting with Commandant STANTA on 27 January 2005