



# Naval Forces Training and Testing in the AFTT Study Area

The Navy's mission is to protect America at sea by defending freedom, preserving economic prosperity, and keeping the seas open and free. This is accomplished by training, certifying and providing combat-ready Navy forces to combatant commanders that are capable of conducting prompt, sustained naval, joint and combined operations in support of U.S. national interests. Naval forces, including the USCG and USMC, must be ready to respond to many different situations in different environmental settings, often under crisis conditions. From large-scale conflict response to maritime security to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, Sailors, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen must be fully trained and prepared to perform these various and demanding duties at a moment's notice.

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Action Proponents will use best available science and methods of analysis to assess the potential environmental impacts associated with conducting training and testing activities within the Atlantic Fleet Training and Testing (AFTT) Study Area, including activities that involve the use of active sonar and explosives. Most of these training and testing activities have been previously analyzed and authorized under the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act and are similar to the types of activities that have been occurring in the AFTT Study Area for decades. Throughout the NEPA process, the National Marine Fisheries Service will participate as a cooperating agency in preparation of the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement/Overseas Environmental Impact Statement (EIS/OEIS).

### TRAINING AND TESTING IN THE AFTT STUDY AREA

For decades, training and testing areas within the AFTT Study Area have provided a safe and realistic environment for training Sailors, Marines, Coast Guardsmen and the testing of platforms and weapons systems.

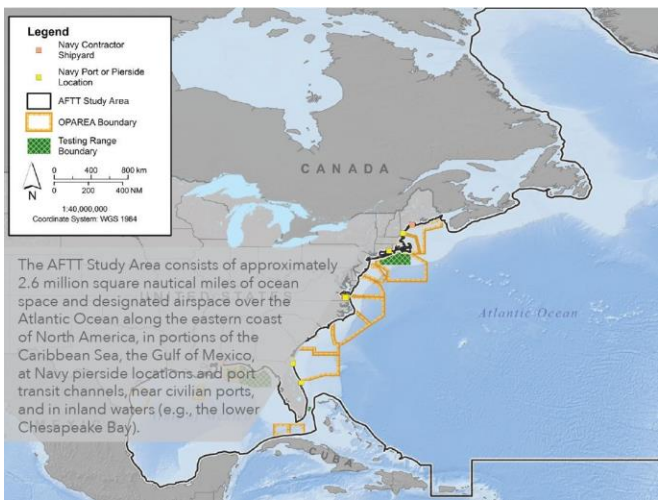
The proximity of these areas to homeports allows for:

- Greater efficiencies during training and testing
- Shorter transit times
- Reduced fuel use, costs, and emissions
- Reduced wear and tear on vessels, submarines, and aircraft

Training close to home also maximizes training time and reduces Sailors, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen's time away from their families.

### IMPORTANCE OF REALISTIC TRAINING AND TESTING

Sailors, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen must be ready to respond to many different situations. The skills needed to achieve military readiness are challenging to master and are perishable without constant practice. Training activities must therefore be diverse and as realistic as possible to prepare Sailors, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen to complete their mission and ensure their success and safety. While simulators provide early skill repetition and enhance teamwork, there is no substitute for live training in a realistic environment. The AFTT Study Area provides a range of realistic training environments and sufficient air and sea space for safety and mission success.



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## IMPORTANCE OF REALISTIC TRAINING AND TESTING CONTINUED

In addition to adequate training, the AFTT Study Area provides the air and sea space necessary to conduct research, development, testing, and evaluation activities (“testing activities”) to ensure vessels, aircraft, and weapons systems operate as intended. Conducting testing activities in varying marine environments, such as differing water depths, seafloor types, salinity levels, and other ocean conditions, and in replicated warfighting environments allows for accurate evaluation of systems before use by Sailors during operations.

## TRAINING ACTIVITIES IN THE AFTT STUDY AREA

Sailors, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen must maintain a rigorous, comprehensive training regimen to ensure ships, aircraft, and submarines are prepared to deploy on schedule and personnel are ready to carry out their duties as required. Sailors, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen participate in four levels of at-sea training, from learning basic skills to working with other military services. This training includes:

- Basic level training, which consists of individuals, small groups of personnel, or a single crew (ship, submarine, or aircraft) training on its own.
- Advanced level training, which hones tactics, techniques, and procedures with other units for mission-specific training.
- Integrated training, which combines individual units and staffs into strike groups or other combined-arms forces and concludes with certification for deployment.
- Sustainment training, which allows strike groups to maintain their highest level of readiness and proficiency.

## TESTING ACTIVITIES IN THE AFTT STUDY AREA

Testing activities conducted in the AFTT Study Area are a critical component to maintaining readiness. Research and development of new technologies by the U.S. Department of Defense occurs continually to ensure the U.S. military can counter new and emerging threats. These technologies must be tested and evaluated before use. Testing activities may include:

- Basic and applied scientific research and technology development.
- Testing, evaluation, and maintenance of sensors and systems, such as missiles, torpedoes, radar, active and passive sonar systems, vessels, submarines, and aircraft.
- Acquisition of technologically advanced vessels, aircraft, and systems to support missions.

Although simulation is a key component in the development of vessels, aircraft, and systems, it does not provide critical data on how they will perform or whether they will be able to meet performance and other specification requirements in the environment in which they are intended to operate. For this reason, vessels, aircraft, and system components must undergo at-sea testing.

**Proposed training and testing activities are similar to the types of activities that have been occurring in the AFTT Study Area for decades. These activities are conducted by the Action Proponents in a manner that demonstrates a commitment to environmental stewardship in the maritime environment.**

# Naval Forces Training and Testing in the AFTT Study Area



Testing vessels, aircraft, and systems in the varying marine environments of the AFTT Study Area allows for accurate evaluation before use by Sailors, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen during operations.

*In the photo at left, U.S. Navy Sailors from Air Test and Evaluation Squadron (VX) 23 and British navy sailors load ordnance on an F-35B Lightning II during flight training aboard the Royal Navy aircraft carrier HMS Prince of Wales (R09) in the Atlantic Ocean, Oct 2023.*

## TACTICAL SKILLS TRAINING

Training activities in the AFTT Study Area provide Sailors, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen with the opportunity to learn and practice skills they need to operate equipment or weapons.

These activities provide realistic experience and include:

- Operating aircraft, ships, and submarines
- Conducting weapons training
- Detecting and locating submarines
- Finding and removing in-water practice mines and other explosive ordnance
- Practicing vessel searches and interdiction



**Training and testing activities must be as realistic and diverse as possible to prepare Sailors, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen for deployment and ensure they maintain the highest level of readiness and capability for their success and survival.**