Naval Air Station Whidbey Island
Air Field Operations

Overview

In operation since September 21, 1942, Naval Air Station (NAS) Whidbey Island is the Navy's sole aviation facility in the Pacific Northwest, providing air traffic control, ground electronics and communications maintenance, air cargo and passenger service, search and rescue operations and air field operations scheduling and maintenance.

NAS Whidbey Island is one of the Navy's largest air stations and considered one of the Navy's most valuable installations. The base supports thousands of training operations for home-based squadrons, as well as support to hundreds of transient military and civilian aircraft operations every year.

Due to the density of aircraft operations at NAS Whidbey Island, Ault Field and OLF Coupeville are often used simultaneously to safely and effectively handle the volume of air traffic at the air station.

Ault Field

The primary Navy units NAS Whidbey Island provides services for are the Navy's Electronic Attack Wing (CVWP) and Patrol and Reconnaissance Wing Ten (CPRW-10). There are also two reserve naval aviation squadrons and numerous other tenant commands on the air station.

A key aspect of Air Operations service at NAS Whidbey Island is support to the two large air wings, CVWP and CPRW-10 in preparing their squadron flight crews and associated personnel for worldwide deployments, including a Fleet Replacement Squadron that provides initial and refresher training for EA-6B and EA-18G crews.

NAS Whidbey Island supports one of the Navy's premier Patrol and Reconnaissance air wings. The P-3 Orion and EP-3 Aries deploy worldwide and are in a constant state of training. Junior pilots, Naval Flight Officers, and air crew in these multiengine aircraft are still in training when they arrive at their command. This requires regular pilot training flights and crew training missions in the Pacific Northwest operating area.

To adequately prepare for worldwide deployments in support of national security objectives, CVWP squadrons must prepare their crews for what is widely considered the most hazardous routine activity in all of military aviation - landing on an aircraft carrier. To ensure crews are proficient at that skill, EA6B and EA-18G pilots must carry out required Field Carrier Landing Practice (FCLP) events at NAS Whidbey Island's Ault Field in Oak Harbor, Wash., and its Outlying Landing Field in nearby Coupeville.

OLF Coupeville

OLF Coupeville is absolutely crucial to that training mission. It would be nearly impossible for NAS Whidbey Island to handle the volume of aircraft operations without OLF Coupeville.

The Outlying Landing Field in Coupeville became active in September 1943, originally as an auxiliary field for Naval Station Seattle, and remained an active landing strip through 1963, when the Navy planned to sell it as excess property.

In 1967 the Navy reactivated the facility to accommodate the increased training and operational demands of the Vietnam War, specifically for FCLP training, which is designed to simulate landing on an aircraft carrier at sea

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Fleet Carrier Landing Practice

FCLP training involves aircraft flying in patterns to practice touch-and-go landings. Each aircraft in turn approaches the runway and touches down, immediately takes off again then loops around and prepares for another landing. Each aircraft makes multiple touch-and-go landings during these training events.

In order to properly prepare crews for the dynamic nature of shipboard flying, it is imperative to replicate carrier landing experience as much as possible. This includes flying at appropriate altitudes and speeds as well as having practice fields at or near sea level. CVWP aircraft perform FCLPs at both Ault Field and OLF Coupeville. OLF Coupeville is ideal for this training practice due to its remote location and low ambient lighting. It more closely replicates true landings aboard an aircraft carrier.

Since 1967, the Navy has continuously used OLF Coupeville for FCLPs. The number of training flights has fluctuated each year since 1967 due to operational requirements. Those flight operations peaked during the Vietnam War, and again in the late 1980s and early 90's. OLF Coupeville is a critical national security asset that provides essential training for Navy pilots based at NAS Whidbey Island to conduct safe and effective aircraft carrier flight operations around the world.