



Media Release

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“Malama na Koa”

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WHEELER ARMY AIRFIELD, Hawaii – The U.S. Army’s 25th Infantry Division Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB) and U.S. Army Garrison Hawaii are reviewing the aviation training plan in response to comments, received from the Big Island community, on the proposed use of several landing zones on the slopes of Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa.

Issues arose this past week after several stories ran in island newspapers questioning what was perceived to be the Army’s new requirement for land expansion and possible restrictions to the residents and visitors around Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa.

Public input was received during the 30-day comment period that is as part of the environmental assessment process in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969.

“The Army has no additional land expansion requirements and will impose no restrictions on anyone as a result of this revised environmental assessment,” said COL Frank W. Tate, commander of the 25th CAB. “The only land that will be impacted by the proposed Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa alternatives from this life-saving training is the pre-existing, 150 foot by 150 foot landing zones that we used from 2004 to 2007.”

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Aviation Training 2.2.2

The Army is taking full responsibility for what's being called 'miscommunication' and looks forward to clearing up any confusion that it may have caused. The concern stems from specific graphics found in the environmental assessment showing large areas of the map depicting possible flight paths but labeled "project area" on the map's legend.

This caused significant concern of some Big Island residents, assuming the Army training would require more land.

"The graphics were not clear in what they portrayed," said Tate. "They designate airspace, not land use, and they were designed to show that by utilizing those routes, we mitigate noise and any impact to the environment or the people on the Big Island."

"The Aviation Brigade needs to utilize the small areas that the landing zones are on, nothing more," said Col. Michael D. Lundy, deputy commander, 25th Infantry Division, referring to the previously mentioned 150 square foot landing zones. "We have a great partnership with the people of Hawaii and the last thing we want is to restrict them or disrupt their daily lives with our training."

The aviation training in question is High Altitude Mountainous Environmental Training (HAMET). As part of the proposed action one of the alternatives requires that the CAB will use the same three landing zones on Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa it used to train for a previous deployment to Afghanistan in 2004. The landing zones provide a realistic, rugged landscape that will match the altitudes, environmental conditions such as turbulence and wind shear that the 25th CAB pilots will face during an upcoming deployment to Afghanistan. The CAB's pilots will have to operate in these demanding conditions while transporting life-saving equipment and troops to the frontlines of the Global War on Terror.

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Aviation Training 3.3.3.

Another concern raised in reaction to the proposed assessment was the massive number of helicopters that would be filling the skies over the mountains. 25th Infantry Division Officials say that's simply not the case. "The original document poorly portrayed what the division wanted to do, and that's our fault," said Maj. Dave Eastburn, a spokesperson for the 25th Infantry Division.

"The fact is, during this training, you'll only see two to four helicopters in the air at any given time. Additionally, the entire Brigade can be trained over the course of three, 15 day exercises, not including holidays or weekends as to not disrupt residents or visitors to the island," Eastburn continued.

"The Army is committed to open decision-making to build the necessary community trust that sustains the Army in the long term and the NEPA process helps to facilitate that," said William Rogers, U.S. Army Garrison NEPA program coordinator. "We advertised the proposed action in the local news papers and mailed the documents to the local libraries and agencies for review and comment. "

"The feedback was tremendous and we are currently considering all comments received. We are in the early stage of our review process and will keep the public informed".

The commander of the Aviation Brigade is optimistic that the changes they are implementing now will allow training to be conducted in a manner that satisfies all interested parties. "I look forward to making this training a reality once again because the bottom line is: this training will save lives," said Tate.

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MEDIA NOTE: Media who would like should contact Jack Wiers, Media Relations chief, U.S. Army Garrison-Hawaii Public Affairs at (808) 656-3157 or cell (808) 542-9489.