



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
22 MAY, 2020

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
Kresten Cook, Executive Director, South Texas Military Task Force
361-960-4772
kresten@unitedccchamber.com

SALUTING OUR LOCAL MILITARY LEADERSHIP AND THEIR MISSIONS

Within the next two months, six of our area's military leaders will be moving on to their next assignments and will be replaced by six new military leaders in our community. Usually, the Changes of Command that accompany such transitions are well-attended events with inspiring military pageantry and speeches recognizing the departing leaders' accomplishments during their tenure in our area. This year, however, these Army, Navy, Marine and Coast Guard commanders will hand over their commands in much smaller, less public ceremonies.

In this challenging time, these military leaders, continued to perform their missions, with little fanfare or publicity, and deserve special recognition for a job well done. The South Texas Community is well known for being a "military friendly" community and it is appropriate to recognize these departing leaders and the important missions to which they were charged.

The overviews below provide information on these leaders; contextualize why these leaders and the missions they command are critical to the defense of our nation; and how these installations are important to the Coastal Bend. Given that they operate, for the most part out of the public eye, Memorial Day is a fitting time to recognize their value to our country and our community.

Information on the incoming military leaders will be forthcoming.

Rear Admiral Dan “Dozer” Dwyer, *Chief of Naval Air Training*

Admiral Dan Dwyer assumed command of Chief of Naval Air Training (CNATRA) in July 2019, which consists of nearly 5,000 military and civilian personnel and 700 aircraft across five training wings in three states. CNATRA trains and qualifies over 1,000 naval aviators and naval flight officers each year for the U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Coast Guard, and international partners.

In addition to his exemplary leadership in defense of our Nation and as our area’s highest ranking military officer, Admiral Dwyer was also an invaluable resource to the City of Corpus Christi and the South Texas Military Task Force in its mission to preserve, protect, communicate, and expand the value of the military installations in the Coastal Bend Region of Texas. It is an honor to have CNATRA be based at Naval Air Station Corpus Christi and in our community.

As CNATRA, Dwyer is also responsible for the Navy Flight Demonstration Squadron, the Blue Angels, who showcase the pride and professionalism of the United States Navy and Marine Corps by inspiring a culture of excellence and service to our country through flight demonstrations and community outreach.

Colonel Gail E. Atkins, *Commander, Corpus Christi Army Depot*

On Jul 20, 2018, Colonel (COL) Gail E. Atkins assumed duties as the Commander of the Corpus Christi Army Depot (CCAD), the largest helicopter facility in the world. CCAD’s mission is to provide cost effective repair, overhaul, and modification of military helicopters and components to the U.S. military. CCAD is one of the largest employers in our area with a significant civilian workforce. With highly technical and skilled employees, CCAD is nationally and globally recognized for its capabilities and performance.

COL Atkins has served our Nation around the world as a battalion commander of the 82nd Combat Aviation Brigade’s Aviation Support Battalion deploying to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, commanding a helicopter detachment in Belgium, providing support to the Supreme Allied Commander of Europe (SACEUR), and being an Air Assault Battalion Operations Officer during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

As the Commander of CCAD, COL Atkins provided long range vision and leadership to more than 3,000 Soldiers and Army Civilians. The large majority of the CCAD workforce are civilians which live in the area and contribute to our local economy. Data from the State of Texas shows that CCAD annually contributes \$1.2 billion to the Texas economy. Under COL Atkin’s leadership, CCAD employees, often referred to as artisans, rebuilt more than 55 aircraft, 675 engines, and 22,956 component parts. Colonel Atkins also deployed Depot Field Teams on 110 missions providing depot expertise to military units around the world.

The City of Corpus Christi was proud to partner with COL Atkins and her team to recently secure \$919K in funding from the Texas Military Preparedness Commission's (TMPC) - Defense Economic Adjustment Assistance Grant (DEAAG) program to improve flight line security and safety. This project was a continuation of the strong partnership between the City of Corpus Christi, the Navy and the Army, and the State of Texas.

For more information on Corpus Christi Army Depot: <https://www.ccad.army.mil/>

Captain Kevin “FDR” Delano, *Commodore, Training Air Wing 4*

CAPT Kevin Delano is a native of Sanger, California and a 1994 graduate of the United States Naval Academy. He was designated a Naval Aviator in October 1996 and holds a master's degree in Military Operational Art and Science from Air Command and Staff College, Montgomery, Alabama, where he also earned the 2009 International Security Studies Award.

CAPT Delano came to Corpus Christi in 2018 to begin his command of TRAWING 4, one of five training air wings under the [Chief of Naval Air Training Command](#). Wing Four, has been training the world's premier military pilots for nearly 50 years has a combined total strength of approximately 800 officer and enlisted personnel and more than 180 aircraft and simulators.

CAPT Delano is a strong supporter of our community, which he touts regularly to visiting family and friends attending winging ceremonies as their sons, daughters, and grandchildren receive their Wings of Gold and become the Navy's newest aviators.

Colonel Bret “Critter” Ritterby, *Commander, Marine Aviation Training Support, Group 22*

Colonel Bret “Critter” Ritterby assumed duties as MATSG-22 Commander in 2018. The mission of MATSG-22 is to enable Marine aviation training while reinforcing Marine Corps values, principles, and competencies in order to forge future Marine aviators for the Fleet Marine Force. Colonel Ritterby has served our Nation around the world completing numerous deployments throughout Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East and flying many combat missions in support of the Global War on Terror.

Col Ritterby has accumulated over 3800 hours in tactical jet aircraft. He is a designated Weapons and Tactics Instructor and Training Landing Signal Officer along with various other flight leadership and instructor qualifications. As Commander of the Marine Aviation Training Support Group 22 in Corpus Christi, Col Ritterby has worked to establish and foster close working relationships across Marine Corps Training Command, Naval Air Training Command, Air Education & Training Command, and other MATSGs.

Captain Erik Spitzer, *Commander, Naval Air Station Kingsville*

Captain Erik A. Spitzer assumed command of Naval Air Station Kingsville on May 6, 2016. His four-year tour of duty will conclude in July, after which, he will assume command of Joint Base Hickam-Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

The mission of NAS Kingsville (NASK) is to provide the infrastructure, amenities, and services to support the intermediate and advanced training of future Navy, Marine Corps and Allied strike fighter pilots. NASK provides advanced training for 50% of the Navy's strike pilots. NAS Kingsville also contributes over \$600M annually to the Texas economy. CAPT Spitzer's responsibilities include oversight of NAS Kingsville's \$2.4B infrastructure including 6,000 acres of land, four 8,000-foot runways, 1.2 million square feet of building space, four aviation hangars and 36,000 cubic miles of airspace including five Military Operating Areas (MOAs) and one Warning Area.

CAPT Spitzer's first operational tour was aboard USS Nimitz (CVN 68), where he completed 16 combat missions supporting Operation Southern Watch. He was then deployed aboard USS Eisenhower (CVN 69) where he completed missions over Iraq and Bosnia. In October 2003 he deployed aboard USS George Washington (CVN 73) in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. In November 2014, he was chosen to lead the Joint Training and Readiness Division, directing the certification and compliance of the Maritime Operations Center. He was promoted to captain in 2016 and assumed command of NAS Kingsville.

As Commander of Naval Air Station Kingsville, Capt. Spitzer ensured complete mission success for 16 tenant and subordinate activities who provided more than 790,900 flight operations and the successful training of 353 new naval aviators. He was the driving force behind \$150 million in infrastructure improvements including the renovation of two major aircraft hangars, a ground training building, three new ammunition bunkers, and the installation of a state-of-the-art airfield lighting system.

Captain Jason E. Smith, *Deputy Sector Commander, Coast Guard Sector/ Air Station Corpus Christi*

Captain Jason E. Smith serves as the Alternate Captain of the Port, Officer-in-Charge of Marine Inspection, Federal Maritime Security Coordinator, and Federal On-Scene Coordinator for South Texas. Throughout his career, CAPT Smith has held numerous field and staff assignments specializing in marine safety, coastal security, and environmental compliance. As alternate Commanding Officer of the Port, Captain Smith's areas of responsibility extend from Matagorda Bay to Brownsville, Texas and 200 nautical miles offshore. He also directs Coast Guard missions along the critical, volatile US/Mexico (MX) Maritime Boundary and for three deep-draft ports including the Port of Corpus Christi, the nation's third largest port by volume.

Captain Smith prepared our local community for dynamic industry shifts and oversaw area navigational modifications in preparation for world's largest vessels safely navigating to and from the nation's largest (LNG) facility.

Additionally, he provided excellent leadership in response and recovery efforts from Hurricane Harvey including optimizing \$50M in hurricane recapitalization of two boat stations and a new 300K square feet state of the art office/hangar facility.

Our community salutes these military heroes for their leadership, positive impact on our community, and service to our Nation.

The South Texas Military Task Force is a non-partisan group comprised of local community and business leaders who recognize the importance of advocating for and supporting our area military facilities.

###