

Four-Legged Wingmen Support Naval Aviation Training at NAS Corpus Christi



Every day, Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard Student Naval Aviators (SNAs) arrive at Naval Air Station Corpus Christi to tackle one of the most demanding training pipelines in the military. The pace of naval aviation training is relentless, but three four-legged wingmen have become an integral part of helping these students navigate the pressure.

Sullivan, known around NAS Corpus Christi as Sully, the facility dog along, with his brothers Duncan and Lachlan, spends his days moving through squadron spaces, classrooms and medical clinic, visiting student naval instructors, civilians and military families. Long before the briefs, simulator events, and flights over the South Texas coastline begin, Sully is already hard at work.

SNAs frequently stop to interact with the dogs before and after flights, while instructors use the opportunity to find moments of calm between grading events and long hours. Handler Pamela Lewis, a Navy spouse of more than 20 years, understands the unique culture and rigor of the training pipeline. She has witnessed firsthand how a simple interaction with Sully can instantly change the tone of an entire room.

“It changes the atmosphere,” Lewis said. “Students could have just come out of a bad flight or a bad simulator event, and suddenly they’re interacting with Sully. It’s immediate joy, and you see the inner child in adults.”

Unlike many therapy dogs found in civilian hospitals, Sullivan, Lachlan, and Duncan work in one of the busiest aviation training environments. As puppies, Lewis introduced Sully and Duncan to aircraft noise, flight line activity and the sights and sounds unique to naval aviation. Through controlled exposure and extensive training, the once-unfamiliar environment became routine, allowing Sully to confidently walk alongside aviators on the flight line.

“We made that noise neutral,” Lewis said. “Now they can stand next to a plane and they’re just like, ‘Hey that’s happening.’”

Sully and his brothers are far more than a morale boost; they are deeply embedded in the culture of NAS Corpus Christi, Chief of Naval Air Training, and Training Air Wing Four. Personnel walking into challenging briefs often pause to pet them, and instructors finishing long shifts decompress during the dogs’ walks around squadron spaces.

Some days are filled with laughter, while others are much quieter, marked by moments when someone simply needs a few minutes of silent connection with a dog before returning to the job. Every interaction is different, but each serves the same vital purpose, reminding aviators that they are not alone.

“They bridge the gap for communication,” said Lewis. “They make our Sailors, dependents, naval aviators and students feel safe if they’re having a horrible day.”

Sully moves easily among students earning their place in the fleet, instructors shaping the next generation of aviators, and leaders responsible for both the mission and the people behind it. Although their impact cannot be measured in flight hours or grades, it is clearly evident in the lowered shoulders, lighter conversations, and quiet moments of support provided by Sully, Duncan, and Lachlan.

Headquartered at Naval Air Station Corpus Christi, Texas, the Chief of Naval Air Training (CNATRA) oversees five training air wings and 17 training squadrons across Florida, Mississippi, and Texas. These squadrons conduct primary, intermediate, and advanced flight training for student naval aviators, naval flight officers, and air vehicle pilots. CNATRA remains steadfast in its mission to train, mentor, and deliver the highest quality naval aviators prepared to win in competition, crisis, and conflict.