

NATRACOM Leaders Highlight Naval Aviation Training Successes, Modernization



SAN ANTONIO, Texas – Leaders from Naval Air Training Command (NATRACOM) led a panel on how NATRACOM is revolutionizing aviation training through meeting aviator production requirements, modernizing training aircraft and curricula, and balancing simulator and live-flight instruction during the 2026 Military Flight Training Summit, Oct 27 in San Antonio.

Rear Adm. Max McCoy, Chief of Naval Air Training (CNATRA), moderated the panel of training-wing, squadron, and human-performance leaders. Panel members included: Capt. Sylvester Foley, commodore of Training Air Wing (TW) 1 headquartered at Naval Air Station (NAS) Meridian, Mississippi; Col. Andrew Kellner, commodore of Training Air Wing (TW) 5 headquartered

at NAS Whiting Field, Florida; Capt. Clay Waddill, commodore of Training Air Wing (TW) 6 headquartered at Naval Air Station (NAS) Pensacola, Florida; Cmdr. Matthew Price, commanding officer of the "Wise Owls" of Training Squadron (VT) 31 headquartered at Naval Air Station (NAS) Corpus Christi, Texas; and Lt. Cmdr. Sarah Beadle, CNATRA Aerospace Experimental Psychologist.

During the panel, McCoy informed attendees that selected training pipelines are producing above their approved requirements, while the command continues to focus on delivering capable aviators to operational fleet units efficiently and on time.

"Naval Aviation Training Command's mission is to provide the best training environment at the right time and at the right cost without pushing training risk to the Fleet," McCoy said. "We're looking at how we can make the entire training system more efficient while ensuring our aviators have the requisite skills and culture to operate fleet aircraft."

Foley discussed advanced jet training in the T-45C Goshawk at TW-1. He emphasized the need to balance simulator instruction with live-flight experience as students prepare for follow-on training.

"Simulation is an important part of how we train, but it is not a substitute for flying," Foley said. "It's about finding the right balance and making sure our students are prepared for what comes next."

Price discussed the transition at VT-31 from the legacy T-44C Pegasus to the modernized T-54A Marlin II and its potential to enhance multi-engine flight training through modernized avionics and instructional methods.

"We have to develop a new way of training that takes advantage of modern technology while maintaining the foundational skills our aviators need," said Price.

Kellner discussed primary and advanced helicopter-training improvements at TW-5, including integration of the TH-73A Thrasher and syllabus adjustments intended to reinforce foundational flight skills. He stated that the command has seen positive early results from restoring additional flight hours to the primary-training syllabus.

Waddill provided an overview of Naval Flight Officer (NFO) training at TW-6, including specialized curricula and simulation-based instruction designed to prepare students for assignments across naval aviation communities.

Beadle shared CNATRA's efforts to improve the collection and analysis of training data, allowing leaders and instructors to better evaluate student performance and assess the effectiveness of curriculum changes and emerging technologies.

The discussion underscored CNATRA's continued focus on delivering capable, adaptable naval aviators and naval flight officers to operational fleet units while modernizing the systems used to train them. The flight training summit brought together over 300 military aviation leaders, training professionals and industry representatives to discuss emerging technologies, training methodologies and strategies to strengthen aviation readiness.

Headquartered at Naval Air Station Corpus Christi, CNATRA oversees NATRACOM, which is composed of five training air wings and 17 training squadrons located across Florida, Mississippi, and Texas. The command is responsible for safely conducting primary, intermediate, and advanced flight training for U.S. Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and allied international student naval aviators and flight officers.

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