

# American World War II Heritage Cities of the Texas Coastal Bend

## NAVAL AIR STATION CORPUS CHRISTI

NAS-CC and auxiliary fields scattered throughout the Coastal Bend served as a vital military training facility during World War II.

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## THE HOME-FRONT CONTRIBUTIONS



The Texas Coastal Cities of Corpus Christi, Aransas Pass, Port Aransas, Kingsville, and Beeville played a significant role in the World War II effort on the home-front. The Naval Air Station of Corpus Christi, proclaimed as the “University of the Air” by its first commanding officer, Capt. Alva Bernhard, had a main station and six auxil-

iary stations in the Coastal Bend. At the time of completion, Naval Air Station Corpus Christi was the largest naval training facility in the world. Commissioned on March 12, 1941, the naval air station graduated over 35,000 student pilots during the course of World War II.

*Photos: Wingspan, vol. 21, no. 20, November 15, 2019, Naval Air Station Corpus Christi*



## PRESERVING OUR WORLD WAR II LEGACY

The people of the Coastal Bend take great pride in their region’s contributions to the war effort and the preservation of World War II history. The *USS Lexington* Museum on the Bay, a National Historic Landmark, serves as a focal point of that pride and transports people back in time to experience the pivotal role of aircraft carriers during the war. Additional landmarks, historical markers, parks, statues, archives, organizations and public ceremonies honor the contributions of the Navy and the Coast Guard, the men and women who served during World War II, the local communities who supported the war effort, and those who later fought for improving conditions of veterans who encountered discrimination.

## NAVAL AIR STATION CORPUS CHRISTI

The fall of France to Germany in June 1940, heightened the possibility that the United States would become increasingly involved in World War II. As the nation faced the possibility of war, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Department of the Navy recognized the urgent need for naval aviators and naval air stations on which to train them. The U.S. Congress, likely encouraged by influential politicians like Richard M. Kleberg, John Nance Garner, and Lyndon Johnson, considered coastal south Texas an ideal location due to its flat terrain, suitable weather for year-round flying, and the ready availability of fuel. The location of the base on Corpus Christi Bay provided the additional incentive of allowing seaplanes to train and deploy.

After Congress authorized construction on June 11, 1940, events moved swiftly with the Naval Air Station officially commissioned on March 12, 1941, and the first cadets arriving later that month. The first class of pilots received their wings on November 1, 1941, only weeks before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Before World War II ended, Naval Air Station Corpus Christi surpassed all other training stations by graduating 35,000 aviators, and becoming known as “the University of the Air.” Cadets who later became notable pilots during the war included future President George H. W. Bush, and future astronaut and Senator John Glenn. Trainees also came from Canada, England, Mexico, Peru, Chile, Argentina, and Bolivia. Scores of W.A.V.E.S. (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service) served at the station and its auxiliary fields as link trainer instructors, pressure chamber technicians, air traffic controllers and gunnery instructors. In addition to the main station, auxiliary airfields were added at Rodd Field (primary flight training), Cabaniss and Cuddihy (intermediate flight training), Kingsville (advanced flight training, fighters and dive bombers), Waldron (torpedo bombers) and Chase Field in Beeville (specializing in instrument flying). Twenty-five additional outlying practice landing fields dotted the surrounding countryside. At the end of the war, the U.S. Army established a camp for German prisoners of war at Naval Air Station Corpus Christi.

The Texas Historical Commission and the Nueces County Historical Commission commemorate the heritage of Naval Air Station Corpus Christi with a Texas Historical Marker. The description is adapted and expanded from the text of the marker.

*Sources: Texas Historical Marker text; Naval Air Station Corpus Christi; Naval Air Station Corpus Christi Wingspan; Library of Congress.*



## THE CONSTRUCTION OF NAVAL AIR STATION CORPUS CHRISTI



To encourage the federal government to build in Corpus Christi, civic leaders donated 640 acres of undeveloped city land and contributed \$2 million to help with the construction cost. The Naval Air Station of Corpus Christi and its auxiliary fields covered some 20,000 acres in three counties and contained 997 hangars and other buildings. Total cost ran to more than \$100 million. Supporting infrastructure included a twenty-mile railroad, a 980-foot rail highway bridge, and a 400-foot trestle bridge across Oso Bay. Workers laid the twenty

miles of track in 35 days. Naval officials proclaimed its Gulf Coast location was “more secure against hostile naval attack than any other continental coastal region.”

Sources *Caller Times*, 1/4/1939; *Texas State Historical Association Handbook of Texas*.  
Photo: USN– *Naval Aviation News* March 1947

## PRESERVATION AT NAVAL AIR STATION CORPUS CHRISTI

On Nov. 12, 2020, the newly renovated Chief of Naval Air Training headquarters—the original administration building for the naval air station—re-opened.



The Station Theater, now known as Wings Auditorium, is currently being rehabilitated. The Protestant Chapel, which opened December 6, 1941, is still used today. After the attack at Pearl Harbor, the chapel, initially closed after the morning service, reopened for prayers.

Photos: *Naval Air Station Corpus Christi*





## CABANISS AND WALDRON FIELDS

Built in 1941 as a satellite field for Corpus Christi Naval Air Station, Cabaniss Field conducted primary and advanced flight training for American cadets and those of several foreign countries. The Navy named the field in honor of Commander Robert W. Cabaniss, killed in a plane crash in 1927. The 1,003-acre field had four asphalt runways and three steel hangers by 1945. The Navy continues to use Cabaniss Field for touch and go training supporting air training operations originating from Naval Air Station Corpus Christi.

Constructed in 1943, Waldron Field served as another satellite airfield for Corpus Christi Naval Air Station and specialized in training torpedo bombers. The U.S. Navy named the field in honor of Lieutenant Commander John C. Waldron, killed in action leading the attack of Torpedo Squadron 8 in the Battle of Midway, on June 4, 1942. The field had four paved runways, large ramps and two large wooden hangers by 1944. The 1945 AAF Airfield Directory stated that the field was 640 acres. Waldron Field currently supports air training operations originating from Naval Air Station Corpus Christi. *Sources: Naval Air Station Corpus Christi; Paul Freeman, "Abandoned & Little-Known Airfields: Texas: Western Corpus Christi Area." 1/13/22*

## KINGSVILLE AUXILIARY AIR STATION

In the fall of 1941, a group of civic leaders from Kingsville decided that the city's desirable climate and scarcely populated area would be very suitable for a military airfield, much like the one in Corpus Christi. The city leaders wasted little time in making their beliefs known to the Department of Defense.

The Kingsville group picked out several good sites for airfields and presented them to Navy leaders at Naval Air Station Corpus Christi. The possibilities impressed

Captain Alva Bernhard, Commanding Officer at Naval Air Station Corpus Christi, and the Navy purchased the farmland site of 3,000 acres that belonged to the B.O. Sims family. The Navy kept the Sims family home as the residence for the commander of the airfield. When the base opened on July 4, 1942, a large crowd of Kingsville citizens came to witness the commissioning ceremony that day. Over the next three years, Kingsville Auxiliary Air Station played a vital role in training Navy and Marine Corps aviators for the fleet. In addition to jet fighter training, pilots received training in carrier dive bombing tactics, anti-submarine warfare, and cockpit gunnery and artillery. In 1968, the auxiliary field was designated as a Naval Air Station. Naval Air Station Kingsville is one of the Navy's premier locations for jet/strike aviation training today.



*Source: Naval Air Station Kingsville*

## PADRE ISLAND BOMBING SITES

The U.S. Navy declared Padre Island off limits to the public in the early 1940s and by 1943 had constructed seven bombing targets and eight strafing targets in what is now Padre Island National Seashore. To protect the coast from German U-Boats, the Coast Guard maintained nine beach patrol stations on the island in 1943. As the threat posed by U-Boats diminished in 1944, the Coast Guard halted the patrols. Bombing continued on the island through the mid-1960s at seven bombing sites located about 14 miles south of Bob Hall Pier and extending further south for 35 miles. Pilots from Corpus Christi Naval Air Station, Kingsville Naval Auxiliary Air Station and Chase Field at Beeville trained on the targets. The pilots dropped practice bombs that contained a powder serving as a visual marker for the observers. A small explosive charge equivalent to a 12-gauge shotgun shell deployed the powder upon impact. The federal government authorized the designation of Padre Island as a national park—the Padre Island National Seashore — in 1962 as a way to “save and preserve, ... the diminishing seashore of the United States that remains undeveloped.” The park comprises 130,473 acres. The U.S. Navy decommissioned the ranges on the island in 1966. *Source: “Padre Island,” GlobalSecurity.org*

## CHASE FIELD, BEEVILLE



Originally planned as a municipal airport, the U.S. Navy commissioned Chase Field as a Naval Auxiliary Air Station in 1943 and trained Navy pilots at the field until 1946. The Navy deactivated the field in 1947 but recommissioned it in 1954 to serve as a jet training facility. The U.S. Navy named the field in honor of Lieutenant Commander Nathan Brown Chase, who died during a training mission in the Pacific in 1925. Over the years, Chase Field's served as an Advanced Jet training station and was designated as the Navy's first swept-wing training center in 1957. The Navy upgraded the field to a full naval air station in 1968. During the Vietnam War, more than one-fourth of all the Navy's pilots received their training there. The U.S. Navy closed Chase Field in 1993.

*Source: Naval Facilities Engineering System Command.*

U S S L E X I N G T O N M U S E U M B Y T H E B A Y

The USS Lexington arrived at Corpus Christi beach in 1992 as a result of active fundraising, and strong community support. The world's oldest aircraft carrier has since served as a naval aviation museum, educational facility, and popular area tourist attraction. "The Blue Ghost" has remained self-sufficient, never receiving funds from government agencies. The revenue that keeps this national treasure open has come solely from grants, donations, admissions, Ships Store sales, special events, and the youth overnight program.



During the 1980's, the U.S. Navy came to realize that keeping in service its last remaining World War II Essex Class aircraft carrier was becoming increasingly expensive and that the USS Lexington would have to be replaced by a more modern ship. In August 1990, the Secretary of the Navy announced that the USS Forrestal would replace the USS Lexington as the Navy's training carrier. Because of Corpus Christi's long and proud history with the Navy and naval aviation in particular, the Corpus Christi Area Economic Development Commission formed a task force of prominent community leaders, known as Landing Force 16, to bring the "Blue Ghost" to the city. With an active fund-raising

campaign in place and strong community support, the Corpus Christi City Council endorsed a \$3 million dollar bond sale to finance the project. In August 1991, Landing Force 16 presented Corpus Christi's proposal to Secretary of the Navy Lawrence Garrett, III.

Although in stiff competition with several other communities, on the strength of community support, the USS Lexington was awarded to the Corpus Christi team. On January 29, 1992, the USS Lexington arrived at Naval Station Ingleside and became a permanent Texas resident. On June 8, 1992, the United States Navy officially signed over the USS Lexington to city officials and on June 17 she was towed to her final berth on North Beach. The USS Lexington was opened to the public in October 1992, and on November 14, 1992, was dedicated in a formal ceremony attended by representatives of the City, State, and Federal governments, as well as former crew members and members of numerous veterans organizations.

Source: *USS Lexington Museum on the Bay*







**The Texas Historical Commission and the Nueces County Historical Commission commemorate these sites with a Texas Historical Marker. The descriptions are adapted from the text of the Texas Historical Markers.**

### WARD ISLAND RADAR STATION



Developed just prior to World War II, RADAR (Radio Detection and Ranging) proved an essential tool for countries in detecting enemy ships and aircrafts and in coordinating the movements of their own. Eager to make use of the new technology, the U.S. Navy acquired Ward Island, a tract of land adjacent to Naval Air Station Corpus Christi, in 1942 to establish a radar station and training facility. Renamed the Naval Air Technical Training Center in 1943, the base operated as the U.S. Navy's only aviation electronics training school during the war and trained over 10,000 technicians for the Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard and the Royal Canadian Air Force.

The U.S. Navy considered the training facility so crucial to the war effort that it operated under the strictest security. According to historian Norman C. Delaney, "Not even the Marine guards knew what was taking place inside the compound. Cadets assigned to the station were prohibited from taking written material out of the classroom and warned that using the word 'radar' outside the facility was a court-martial offense." The sighting of a German U-boat in the ship channel near Aransas Pass only heightened the precautions taken. Yet, as is often the case, security was not always a top priority for everyone. At one time supplies arrived in Corpus Christi with a bill of lading addressed to "Radar Island."

The U.S. Navy closed the base in 1947 and moved its training facility to Memphis Naval Air Station in Millington, Tennessee. Ward Island then became the home of the University of Corpus Christi, and later Texas A&M University—Corpus Christi. Students and nature lovers can be found on the hike and bike trail that wraps 7.3 miles around Ward Island today.

*Source: Excerpt from "Corpus Christi's University of the Air" by Norman C. Delaney, Naval History Magazine, May 2013, vol. 27, no. 3. Murphy Givens, Caller Times, "What was the big secret on John Ward's Island, August 14, 2018. Photo: Caller Times.*

## COASTAL DEFENSES AT THE ARANSAS PASS

After the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the U.S. increased defense efforts along the Texas coast to protect military bases and key wartime industries. A month later, in what may have been a false alarm, locals reported a German U-Boat, or submarine, just miles off the entrance to the Aransas Pass. The Southern Defense Command under Lieutenant General Walter Krueger dispatched a temporary field artillery battery of the 2nd Infantry Division to Mustang Island, where they set up 105 mm Howitzers. In April 1942, Battery E of the 50th Coast Artillery Regiment arrived. The new troops remained until October 1942 and began emplacing two French-designed 155 mm GPF Guns on Panama mounts and building timber magazines. They also began construction on a commander station, a camp for 360 men, and mounted search lights to cover the area. Two companies later stationed there finished the work: Battery G, 20th Coast Artillery Regiment (Oct. 1942-Mar. 1944) and Battery E, 20th Coast Artillery Regiment (Mar.-Jul. 1944). In conjunction with the coast artillery, the U.S. Navy operated a harbor entrance control post. Officially designated as Temporary Harbor Defense at Aransas Pass, this coastal defense complex just south of the south jetty closed in July 1944.

*Source: Texas Historical Marker text; Photo: National Archives & Research Administration*



## U.S. COAST GUARD

Even though Aransas Pass has significantly influenced the economic development of the Coastal Bend, the natural waterway has some treacherous navigational hazards. In 1878, the U. S. government attempted to address this situation by establishing the first Aransas Life Saving Station on Mustang Island, at Cotter and Station Streets in the city of Port Aransas. The station served the regional waters for several decades until the wind and storm surge from the 1919 hurricane destroyed it. The Coast Guard, which replaced the Life Saving Service in 1914, then served out of an interim facility until 1925 when the second lifesaving station opened. Erosion of the second station's concrete foundation, combined with an increasing workload, resulted in the structure's replacement in 1976.

President Woodrow Wilson and Congress combined the Colonial era Revenue Cutter Service and the Life Saving Service (est.1878) to form the U.S. Coast Guard in 1915. A key component of the Coast Guard's mission is Ports, Waterways, and Coastal Security (PWCS). During World War II, in keeping with that mission, the primary lifesaving mission at Mustang Island grew to encompass all of those elements in and around Corpus Christi and the Coastal Bend. In coordination with the U.S. Navy, the Coast Guard kept watch for enemy naval activity, incursions by enemy agents, and sabotage.

*Source: Texas Historical Marker text*



## U.S. COAST GUARD IMAGES



Huts were built every two miles along the beachfront and Coast Guardsmen on horses with dogs patrolled the beach from these huts 24/7 looking for saboteurs or anyone approaching from the sea.

Coast Guard personnel on the beach kept constant vigilance toward the town of Port Aransas as well as the Gulf. A blackout was required of any building and no lights were to be visible.



Navy "crash" boats were docked at the harbor with the mission of being instantly available should a flyer from the Naval Air Station crash in the water. Other rescue commands handled crashes on the island itself. A Hospital Boat, YP98, was also stationed in the harbor.

*Source and images: Mark Creighton, Port Aransas Museum; Port Aransas Preservation and Historical Association.*



TEXAS HISTORICAL MARKERS  
GERMAN POW CAMP

After the end of the war in Europe in 1945, as German POWs waited to be returned home, the U.S. Army established a temporary prisoner of war camp at Naval Air Station Corpus Christi. The Army sent 300 prisoners from Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio to the new camp. There the prisoners worked to build their own quarters and to help with maintenance on the base including construction, clearing brush, landscaping, and work around the mess hall and recreational facilities. Historian Norman C. Delaney interviewed several of the POWs for his *An Oral History of the Naval Air Station Corpus Christi During World War II*. Those interviews and notes are housed as the Special Collections Department of Bell Library at Texas A&M University Corpus Christi. *Source: Excerpt from "Corpus Christi's University of the Air" by Norman C. Delaney, Naval History Magazine, May 2013, vol. 27, no.3.*

## GULF INTRACOASTAL WATERWAY

During World War II, the Port of Corpus Christi served as a vital link between the oil and agricultural fields of South Texas and the war effort. Connected to the east coast by the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, a 3,000-mile inland waterway stretching along the Atlantic Coast and the Gulf of Mexico, the port shipped over 100 million tons of cargo along the route. Initially designed to protect gulf shipping from storms, the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway also helped to protect vital shipping from enemy ships and submarines. *Source: Texas Historical Marker text*

PRESIDENTS ROOSEVELT AND CAMACHO  
MEETING AT NAVAL AIR STATION - CC

On April 21, 1943, in the midst of World War II, President Franklin Roosevelt and Mexican President Manuel Avila Camacho met with officers and cadets at Naval Air Station Corpus Christi to commemorate the cooperation between the two "sister American republics" in the war effort and the peace that would follow. The meeting was part of a sixteen-day, 7,244-mile, journey by train for Roosevelt and his entourage to inspect twelve military installations and four manufacturing plants dedicated to the war effort. Unbeknownst to the press prior to his arrival in Mexico, the trip also included a brief visit by Roosevelt to Monterrey to meet with President Camacho on April 20, 1943. The historic visit to Monterrey included a tour of the city followed by an elaborate reception and banquet designed to celebrate the mutual friendship and cooperation between the two countries – the fruit of Roosevelt's "Good Neighbor" policy toward Latin America. Following the visit to Monterrey, Roosevelt and Camacho traveled together by rail to the Naval Air Station. After attending an initial reception at the administration building, Roosevelt and Camacho joined the cadets for lunch at the cadet mess hall. Special guests at the President's table included cadet officers specially chosen from the various training squadrons. After the lunch, Roosevelt gave a brief address which was transmitted to the entire base over the public address system and President Camacho met with the nine cadets from Mexico. While Roosevelt and Camacho met with the men, Eleanor Roosevelt spoke to the WAVES in their mess hall. Afterwards, members of the President's party toured the base, observed the cadets on the obstacle course, and ended up by the waterfront where they witnessed an impressive display of aerial practice maneuvers by the PBY patrol bombers, the dive bombers, and a squadron of sea planes. According to both Presidents, the meeting exceeded all expectations and encouraged further cooperation between the two governments. *Source: Texas Historical Marker application (Plaque pending)*

## A M E R I C A N   G I   F O R U M

World War II provided Latino and Latina Americans the opportunity to fight for their country and for freedom around the world. Hundreds of thousands served in the U.S. Armed Forces during the conflict. Although these men and women often returned with a renewed idealism and a hope for a brighter future, they often encountered entrenched prejudice. As a physician treating veterans for the Veterans Administration in Corpus Christi, Dr. Hector Perez Garcia, a native of Corpus Christi, witnessed firsthand the discrimination against Mexican Americans. A decorated veteran who served in the U.S. Army Medical Corps in Europe, Garcia vowed to improve conditions for the Mexican American community and its veterans.



On March 26, 1948, approximately 700 Mexican American veterans met in the auditorium at the Mira-beau B. Lamar Elementary School to organize the American G.I. Forum. In keeping with its commitment to involving the entire family, the organization later formed a women's auxiliary and a Junior G.I. Forum.

An incident known as the “Longoria Affair” brought national attention to the American G.I. Forum in 1949. Private Felix Longoria had served during the war and was killed in action in the Pacific. When the military repatriated his remains to Three Rivers in Live Oak County, a local funeral home denied his widow the use of its chapel for the wake. Dr. Garcia agreed to intercede on behalf of the family, and the publicity from the incident established Dr. Garcia and the American G.I. Forum as civil rights leaders.

### M E M O R I A L S

#### D R .   G A R C I A ’ S   S T A T U E   A N D   P A P E R S



In recognition of Dr. Hector P. Garcia’s service, Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi designed an on-campus plaza and dedicated a statue in his honor in 1996. Roberto Garcia Jr. created the bronze statue. It is nine feet tall and weighs 1800 pounds.

When Dr. Garcia died one month after the dedication, his estate conveyed his personal and professional papers to Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi to be used for future research. The papers include archives on the American GI Forum and cover the

major issues faced by Mexican Americans during Dr. Garcia’s career. His medical office at 3001 Morgan Avenue is a designated Corpus Christi local landmark.

*Photos: Texas A&M University—Corpus Christi*



S H E R R I L L V E T E R A N S M E M O R I A L P A R K



Warren Joseph Sherrill was only 21 years old when he became Corpus Christi’s first casualty of World War II. Sherrill served as a Navy yeoman on the *USS Arizona* and was killed in the attack of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. On March 1943, the Corpus Christi City Council designated a block of land on Shoreline Boulevard just south of the USO building as Sherrill Park. Since its creation, the park has been the setting for veterans and patriotic services. In 2017, the City changed the name to Sherrill Veterans Memorial Park.

Sherrill Veterans Memorial Park is home to a 600-pound bronze plaque with the names of 399 Nueces County residents killed in World War II. Originally displayed at Memorial Coliseum (demolished in 2010) and in the City Hall, the city moved the plaque to Sherrill Park in 2011 as part of a new memorial which includes a scenic walkway and display wall made of bricks salvaged from Memorial Coliseum.

Chapter 5 of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association unveiled a 4-by-5-foot granite monument dedicated to the 82 men from Corpus Christi who survived the bombing at Pearl Harbor. The association unveiled the monument on Memorial Day in 2007 and dedicated it on December 7 that year, the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the attack. Other memorials at Sherrill Park honor those who served in World War I, Korea, Vietnam, the Global War on Terror, and with the Coast Guard. An eternal flame was installed on Memorial Day in 1969.



Source: Allison Ehrlich, “#TBT: Sherrill Park named for Corpus Christi’s first World War II casualty,” *Caller Times* May 22, 2019. Photos: *Caller Times*; *HonorStates.org*

A M I S T A D V E T E R A N S M E M O R I A L P A R K



Located in Bishop, this park features a Veterans Memorial Courtyard with monuments and benches to honor all veterans from Bishop, Driscoll and Petronilla who made the ultimate sacrifice. Source: *Nueces County* [www.nuecesco.com](http://www.nuecesco.com)

## USS LEXINGTON MUSEUM BY THE BAY MEMORIALS



- USS Lexington CV-16 Aircraft Carrier National Historic Landmark Marker
- CV-2 Memorial— Honors the crew of “CV-2”, the first Lexington carrier, which was the largest ship in the U.S. Navy when sunk in May 1942 in the Battle of the Coral Sea.
- Museum hosts CV-16 Association of former crew every four years. The Association has former crew from 1943-1991.

## STREET NAMES HONOR WWII HISTORY

In August of 1942, the Corpus Christi City Council voted to rename 13th Street to Brownlee Boulevard in honor of Army Air Corps Private William J. Brownlee, a 19-year-old native of Corpus Christi. Brownlee was killed during the Japanese attack on Hickam Field near Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. The local Jaycees led the effort.

Other Corpus Christi street names including Lexington Boulevard, Yorktown Boulevard, Saratoga Boulevard, and Rodd Field Road memorialize World War II history.

Source: Allison Ehrlich, “Corpus Christi’s first two WWII casualties were stationed at Pearl Harbor.” *Corpus Christi Caller Times*, 12/7/2016

Image: Photo: HonorStates.org





## COASTAL BEND STATE VETERANS CEMETERY



The Coastal Bend State Veterans Cemetery in Corpus Christi was dedicated on December 7, 2011 (Pearl Harbor Day) and opened on Dec. 14, 2011 for burials. It is the fourth Texas State Veterans Cemetery built and run by the Texas Veterans Land Board, under the Texas General Land Office. The current size of this cemetery is 54 acres with potential for up to 31,500 burial plots.

This cemetery includes a covered, open-air structure for committal services, a visitor's center, a computer kiosk for locating specific graves, an assembly area for special occasions, such as Memorial Day observances, an avenue of flags and a memorial walkway for future monuments. The cemetery is also the original founding site for a nationally recognized program known as the "Unaccompanied Veteran Program".

To date, the Coastal Bend State Veterans Cemetery has 432 World War II veterans resting on its hallowed grounds. The cemetery staff are currently working diligently to erect a monument dedicated to the military men and women served our nation during World War II.

Source: *Coastal Bend State Veterans Cemetery, General Land Office*





## KLEBERG COUNTY WAR MEMORIAL BUILDING



The Kleberg County War Memorial Building was constructed on the southwest corner of the Kleberg County Courthouse lawn in Kingsville, Texas. Sponsored originally by the Kingsville Jaycees, it is now maintained by the county. On the interior are bronze plaques honoring the veterans of World War I, World War II, the Korean Conflict, the Vietnam Conflict, among others. The Granite Monument was donated by the Kingsville Jaycees. The Fountain Area was donated by the Alice G. Kleberg Foundation. A 21 gun salute is presented at the Memorial Day Ceremony at the memorial. Photo: Waymaking.com

## SOUTH TEXAS AVIATOR MEMORIAL

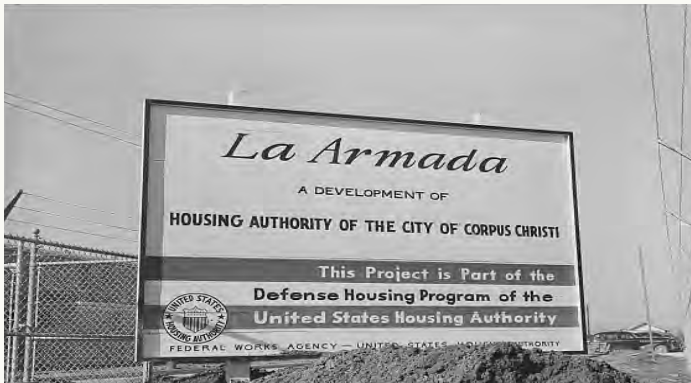


Dedicated in 2017 at Ropes Park in Corpus Christi, the memorial depicts a bronze Naval Aviator in uniform holding a helmet at his side. The statue stands on a pedestal surrounded by a brick walkway recognizing donors. South Texas Aviator Memorial Association spearheaded the creation of the memorial and sponsored the fundraising effort.

*Photo: City of Corpus Christi*

## L A A R M A D A H O U S I N G P R O J E C T

The construction of the Naval Air Station Corpus Christi brought a huge influx of military members, civilian employees, and their families. From 1940-1941, the city's population increased by thirty percent to 75,000 and Corpus Christi became the fastest growing city in Texas. To address the resulting housing shortage, the City of Corpus Christi built La Armada 1, a 250-unit housing complex and the first defense housing project in the country. Located at 3721 Ayres St., La Armada 1 was the first of four projects undertaken by the Housing Authority. La Armada II (400 units) and La Armada III (100 units) soon followed. The Housing Authority has since modernized these properties and continues to use them for affordable housing. *Source: Corpus Christi Housing Authority; Photos: Library of Congress*



## C I V I L D E F E N S E P R E P A R E D N E S S

The first dusk to dawn blackout ever ordered in the United States was held in the Texas coastal cities of Corpus Christi, Port Aransas, Aransas Pass, Ingleside and Portland. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, six giant air-raid sirens were installed across Corpus Christi. The newspaper printed instructions for the first black out drill which was held on January 19, 1942, between 9 and 9:30 p.m. The sirens were used to signal the beginning of the drill. A *Caller Times* reporter wrote, "The atmosphere was tense and the darkness so thick that you were a little leery about going outside." Ten days later, the first dusk to dawn blackout was ordered, prompted by a U-boat sighting in the Gulf near Port Aransas.

### *National Youth Administration*

During World War II, 20,000 civilians who enlisted with the National Youth Administration for civil defense jobs were employed at Naval Air Station Corpus Christi. They learned to service and repair Navy planes. *Source: Jim Maloney and Murphy Givens, Corpus Christi — A History, 2011. Photo: John Frederick*



*"Doc" McGregor—Corpus Christi Public Libraries Digitized Collections; Defense Day Parade.*



## CIVIL DEFENSE PREPAREDNESS

## Kingsville Red Cross

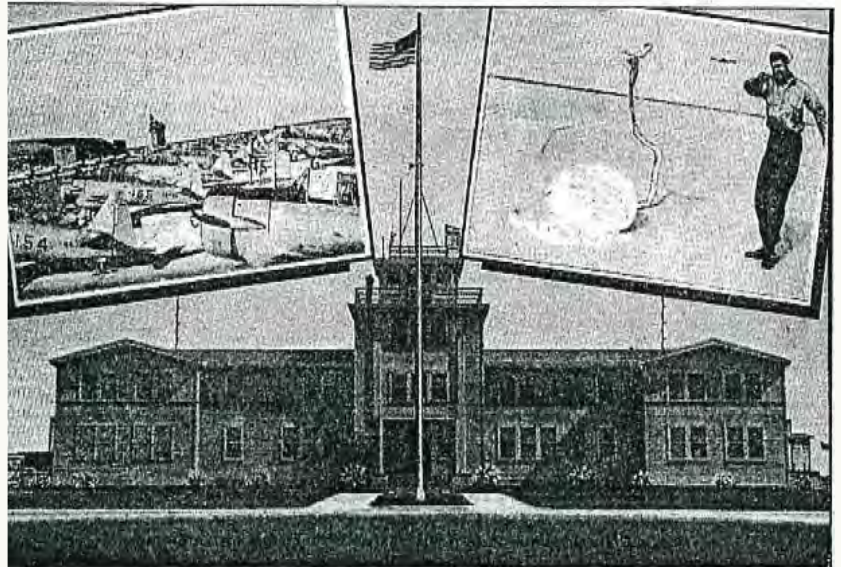
In 1941, with World War II impending, Kingsville expanded their Red Cross to 20 departments covering all phases of work. A fund drive resulted in \$3,300, the largest that had ever been collected. The Disaster Committee set up First Aid Stations and trained nurses. Kleberg-Kenedy was selected as one of six areas to have a community Auxiliary Nursing Service. Volunteers sewed and folded dressings and knitted garments which were sent to military stations. The Canteen Corps set up centers supervised by 85 women. A volunteer Special Services Motor Corps taught 42 women motor mechanics who were ready to serve in an emergency.

Mrs. Robert J, Kleberg organized a Hospital Corps in South Texas to bridge the gap between the Red Cross and the Army and Navy to meet the needs of the military personnel hospitalized in Corpus Christi.

Men and women operated the USO and served on the Ration Board. An estimated 1,000 local residents were active in the war work.



The Kingsville USO (Photos courtesy of South Texas Archives)



The Naval Auxiliary Air Station in 1942. (Photos courtesy of South Texas Archives)

Source: "The American Red Cross in Kleberg-Kenedy Counties" Images: South Texas Archives



## WAR BOND DRIVES

On April 30, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt announced the arrival of the new Defense Savings bond, colloquially known as war bonds, as “one great partnership” to finance defense efforts. The bonds along with smaller denomination stamps would begin issue the following day. Roosevelt purchased the first bond the next day from Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau.

Corpus Christi, like other cities around the country, jumped into the action. When the bonds went on sale at post offices and banks in Nueces County, officials reported brisk sales by noon. Meredith Queen, founder of First Federal Savings and Loan Association in Corpus Christi, was announced as chairman of the newly created Nueces County committee for the sale of defense bonds and stamps. Appointed to the state committee in charge of bond sales was the city’s well-known and well-connected philanthropist, Clara Driscoll.

On the first day of sales in Nueces County, \$30,200 was collected. Converted to today’s dollars, that is more than half a million in sales. The committee in Nueces County gathered and began creating sub-committees to drive sales, focusing on women’s organizations, luncheon groups, radio speakers and local schools. The Corpus Christi *Caller-Times* was peppered with ads: large ads from the Treasury and local banks, sandwiched in ads for products like clothing and appliances, to the simple sentence “Buy War Bonds and Stamps!” in the classified pages



In May 1942, many theaters in the country became sales outlets for war bond and stamps, often pairing the sales with special movie premieres and featuring bond sales girls in lobbies. Corpus Christi Theatres Inc., owner of the popular Ritz and Centre theaters in town, offered a number of promotions including a July 3, 1942, 11:15 p.m. double feature of “Mr. Bug Goes to Town” and “The Falcon Takes Over.” Between 1941 and 1945, the committees featured other incentives, from free Nylons, sightseeing trips on submarines, and even elephant rides.

The Treasury closed the war bond program in December 1945 but having realized the benefits of bond purchases for the public, immediately started the peacetime U.S. Savings Bond program on January 1, 1946. On January 6, 1946, the *Caller-Times* provided a summary of the war bond drives, where Nueces County exceeded their quotas in each of the eight campaigns, with the most impressive between April-June 1945 when locals exceeded the \$6 million goal by purchasing more than \$11 million in war bonds. The final tally showed Nueces County sold more than \$50 million in war bonds between 1941 and 1945.

Source: Allison Ehrlich, “War Bonds During WWII.” Photo: John Frederick “Doc” McGregor—Corpus Christi Public Libraries Digitized Collections. War Bond Booth at Centre Theater

## WAR BOND DRIVES

## Texas War Heroes and Hollywood Stars Tonight Will Stage War Bond Sale in Front of Theatre

Three Hollywood stars, a minstrel man and four Texas war heroes from the Army hospital at Galveston are scheduled to arrive in Corpus Christi at 4 o'clock this afternoon to stage an open-air War Bond sales in front of the Palace Theatre at 8 o'clock tonight. They are coming from Bay City, after a similar show there.

Big Boy Guinn Williams, famed Western actor since 1915, will be accompanied by blond Peggy O'Neill, RKO starlet, Radio Singer Betty Jane Greer, and Jimmie Allard, minstrel show man who will act as master of ceremonies.

The troupe will make a personal appearance at the Naval Air Station upon its arrival. The troupe will be conducted by Lt. Miles K. Burton, NATC war bond promotional officer, and will pre-

sent a show at the station theatre at 5:30 o'clock. Following the show, the cast will have dinner with aviation cadets at the Naval Air Station.

The U. S. Navy Band, from the NAS, will open the bond rally in front of the Palace Theatre at 7:30 o'clock tonight, and the Hollywood troupers will make their appearance at 8 o'clock. The show, sponsored by Corpus Christi Theatres and the Retail Merchants Committee for the Fifth War Loan drive, will be free, but the committee hopes that each member of the audience will purchase at least one War Bond. Booths will be set up within the theatre for the sale of bonds, with 100 girls who are employed by local merchants will handle the purchases. Prizes will be awarded to highest bond

bidders by the three stars of the show. The actors will put on a show in Robstown at 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

J. L. Anderson, permanent payroll savings plan chairman for Nueces County, announced today that two firms, Chicago Corp. and Guaranty Title and Trust Co., have exceeded the Fifth War Loan quota of a \$100 bond per employee on the savings plan, according to tabulations yesterday.

Chicago Corp., which employees 280 persons, expects almost to double its quota before the end of the drive, according to Ed Smith, firm representative, and Keith Collier, special Treasury Department representative. Mark Welsh, manager of Guaranty Title and Trust Co., and Walt Edgmon, special Treasury Department rep-

resentative, stated yesterday that the 48 employees of the firm had signed up on the payroll savings plan for a \$100 bond each.

Nick Carl, Treasury Department representative in charge of city employees, has commended the city on its participation in the current drive. More than half of the employees have signed on the savings plan.

An employee of Southern Alkali Corp., which exceeded its quota in the last drive, called War Bond Headquarters yesterday. He had signed for his \$100 bond with his firm but wished to invest \$500 more in bonds and didn't know how he could credit this to his company. "Each of these firms," said Anderson, "is a bond issuing agent and employees may purchase from them and give credit to the quota of the company in this drive."

## Rally To Feature Hollywood Stars

A War Bond rally featuring the personal appearance of a number of movie stars and heroes from widely-scattered war fronts will be held at the Ritz Theatre Saturday night, it was announced last night.

The local premiere of the motion picture, "We've Never Been Licked," the story of Texas A&M College, will be held at the same time. The picture is being brought

### TETTER (externally caused) CHECK ITCHING—BURNING

The antiseptic-stimulating way with famous Black and White Ointment. Promotes healing. Use only as directed. Over 20 years success. Sold in 10¢, 25¢, 50¢ sizes. Money-back guarantee. Cleanse daily with Black and White Skin Soap.

**Announcing**  
the Re-opening of  
**ODEM STUDIO**

here for only one performance now.

Sam Stokes, chairman of the local war activities committee of the motion picture industry, said that the stars would include Anna-bella, the wife of Second Lt. Tyrone Power, USMCR, William Boyd, Grace Bradley and Mary Brian. Power, well-known motion picture star, is stationed at Ward Island.

Admission to the rally and motion picture show will be by purchase of War Bonds, Stokes said. A committee will meet this morning to work out details of the rally and determine how seats will be allotted to bond purchasers.

Stokes said there was a possibility that other motion picture stars would be here for the event. He expects details this morning on the World War II veterans who are accompanying them. The delegation will arrive here by plane Saturday morning. Corpus Christi is one of 50 cities in the United States included on the tour.

Source: Newspaper Articles, Corpus Christi Caller Times, Tuesday, September 7, 1943, p. 7; December 8, 1943, p. 7; December 1, 1942, p. 8-B; June 21, 1944, p. 1., November 20, 1942, p. 3

## NATC Sets War Bond Record on Pearl Harbor Day

More than 9,000 persons attached to the Naval Air Training Center in either a military or civilian capacity purchased additional war bonds aggregating \$336,285 during the Pearl Harbor Day drive which was climaxed yesterday with a colorful ceremony in which Second Lt. Tyrone Power, USMCR, served as master of ceremony.

Rear Adm. Charles P. Mason, USN, commandant of the NATC, addressed the assembled group of officers, enlisted personnel, cadets and civilian employees, and expressed pride in the tremendous increase shown over last year's figure.

Scrolls bearing the names of all bond purchasers from the various stations and other units of the NATC were presented to Capt. E. O. McDonnell, USN, chief of staff of the NATC, and these, later joined end to end to form a long ribbon held by representatives of the different units, extended for a distance of approximately 300 feet.

The total figure of purchases, still incomplete but representing actual cash sales prior to 2 o'clock yesterday afternoon, represented a 122 per cent increase over last year's Pearl Harbor Day figure.

PAGE 8-B

## AVENGE



DECEMBER 7TH

BUY A WAR BOND  
AT ANY CORPUS CHRISTI  
THEATRE

ON TO VICTORY

# HAVE YOU BOUGHT WAR BONDS OR STAMPS TODAY?



WAR BOND DRIVES



Photo inscription: War Bond Sales Girl for Corpus Christi Naval Air Base (A&R) during World War II. Mary Virginia (Toni) Almaguer.

Source: Debbie Fagan Zuniga, Texas Coastal Bend Chapter 1 - Blue Star Mothers of America, Inc.

Photo inscription: Mary [Virginia Almaguer] selling war bonds at A&R NAS, November 1943/1944 to her foreman Bob.

Source: Debbie Fagan Zuniga, Texas Coastal Bend Chapter 1 - Blue Star Mothers of America, Inc.

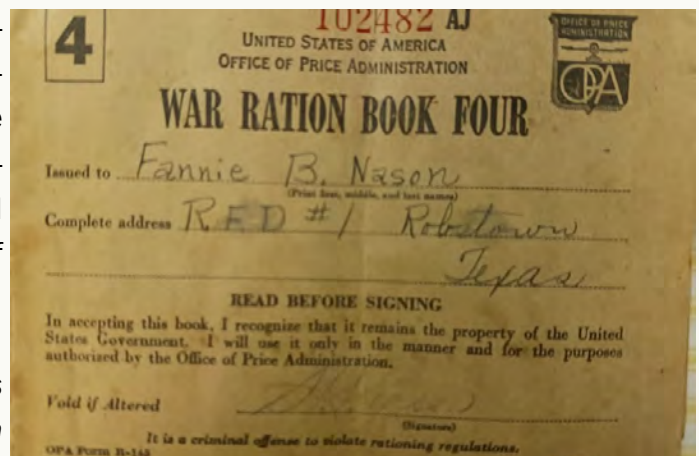




## WAR RATIONING AND COLLECTION DRIVES

Community members participated in rationing of food, clothing items, auto parts, rubber, and gasoline. Restaurants voluntarily observed “Meatless Tuesday.” Families planted “Victory Gardens” to grow their own food, so that harvested food could go towards the war effort. A large bin was moved to the bayfront for the collection of aluminum scrap metal for the war effort which was eventually shipped out from the port. An airplane dropped 10,000 leaflets encouraging homemakers to contribute pots and pans to the drive. Another drive, “Bundles for Britain,” collected articles for the besieged British. Ladies saved cooking grease for the national grease supply. After the war, food shortages in Corpus Christi continued with a meat panic in 1945 and a bread panic in 1946 when stores received only a fraction of their supply.

Source: *Jim Maloney and Murphy Givens, Corpus Christi – A History, 2011. Images: War Ration Book, courtesy John Lloyd Bluntzer.*



## WAR TIME INDUSTRY

The greatest petrochemical industry in the world was built along the Texas Gulf Coast to refine fuel for the Americans and Allies. The petroleum industry contributed to the war by providing more than 90% of the oil. Local refineries produced the fuel for airplanes used to train aviators at the Naval Air Station. Many people joined war-related industries where manpower was needed. Women joined the workplace to support families and themselves with men off fighting the war.

Source: *Ben H. Proctor, “World War II,” Handbook of Texas, www.tshaonline.org. Jim Maloney and Murphy Givens, Corpus Christi – A History, 2011.*

## PORT OF CORPUS CHRISTI

Orders signed by President Roosevelt, in February and April of 1942, gave “control of terminal and port facilities...and of the movement of...ships” to the War Shipping Administration; at the same time, responsibility for port security and merchant-marine personnel went to the United States Coast Guard. The militarization paid off: from 1941 through 1946, the total amount of “cargo shipped out...on vessels operated by or allocated to the Army, on vessels operated by or allocated to the Navy, and on commercial vessels for the military forces or for civilian relief” totaled 132,119,533 measurement tons.

Much of that came from the Port of Corpus Christi, now under the auspices of the War Shipping Administration and the U.S. Navy, but managed, as always, through the Nueces County’s Navigation District. Although not as major as those of New Orleans or Houston, the Port’s exports, particularly of oil, were significant, especially since so few vessels were available to carry it. For lack of deep sea tankers, exports from South Texas decreased by 2,268,917 tons by the end of 1942, as did the number of sailings from the harbor.

The Port’s only hope, admitted its director Adams, “will be afforded when the intracoastal waterway is opened to nine-foot barges this spring....[They] cannot operate outside on deep sea work.” The barges’ “immunity from seizure for re-allocation” paid off in the next few years as the Intracoastal Canal came into operation. By the end of 1943 the Port was able to export 1,005,916 tons of crude and refined oil for the war effort. A year later, Adams wrote, “in spite of the war and complete loss of our two Pacific coast services and three Atlantic dry cargo weekly services and nearly all of our former huge export oil movement...coastwise tonnage has held up remarkably well. It may be noted that not a single vessel calls here except by allocation of the War Shipping Administration with approval of the US Navy.” By January 1945, eight months before Japan’s surrender, Adams reported “a substantial part of the petroleum shipped by water from the Port of Corpus Christi in 1944 moved in barges on the Intracoastal Canal. A total of 908 canal barges sailed from this port carrying 7,009, 854 barrels of oil.”

By the beginning of the next year, the Port Director could point to a total of 5,815,195 tons shipped out from Corpus Christi in 1945. Mostly still petroleum products, the Port was anticipating a return to its original commerce, “when the dry-cargo dock units are released by the Navy and the port will be able...to resume the exportation of cotton.” But in the meantime, “the Navigation District’s port properties, wharves and docks, have been maintained in excellent condition for the resumption of port-war commerce.”

Source: “Port of Corpus Christi,” by Mary Jo O’Rear.

## COLLECTIONS

## Naval Air Station Corpus Christi Archives

Consolidated Naval Air Station Corpus Christi History, 1940–2017– 54 pages.

*Wingspan* newsletters, photographs, and other documents.

## Special Collections and Archives, Mary and Jeff Bell Library, Texas A&amp;M University Corpus Christi

**Charles H.F. von Blucher Family** collection – Collection includes photographs from Europe during WWII, military planning maps, pamphlets, infantry drill regulations, depth of craters of delayed action bombs, war ration books.

**Dr. Norman C. Delaney** collection – Corpus Christi Naval Air Station Interviews and Memorabilia of World War II Veterans.

**Anita Eisenhower** Historical Postcard and Research Collection – Includes military events in World War I and World War II.

**Jose Flores** papers - This collection is a brief snapshot in time of Jose Flores prisoner of war experience in the European theater of World War II, and the paperwork trail that followed it.

**Rafael Sr. and Virginia Galvan** family papers – Photos in uniform, Europe, 1945. Rafael Galvan Sr. (1887-1966) and his wife, Virginia Reyes Galvan (1889-1980), were the family figureheads of an early, post-pioneer Corpus Christi that saw boundaries between race, life, and music begin to dissolve for the betterment of the city. Rafael Galvan Sr. was the first Mexican American police officer in Corpus Christi as well as a founding member of the League of United Latin American Citizens (L.U.L.A.C). He was also a local businessman with several ventures, including a grocery store, Laguna Fish & Oyster, and the Galvan Ballroom.

**Dr. Hector Garcia** papers - The papers of Dr. Hector P. Garcia (1914-1996) are a centerpiece of the university's manuscript holdings. Corpus Christi physician, founder of the American G.I. Forum, and legendary community leader, Dr. Garcia was active in political and civic affairs for over fifty years and ranks as one of the most important figures in Mexican American history. Dr. Garcia's papers comprise one of the most valuable resources in existence on the Mexican-American experience during the last half of the twentieth century. They include records relating to the American G.I. Forum, which he began in 1948, and cover the major issues faced by Mexican Americans during his career as a champion of civil rights. This remarkable historical resource recently has been made easier to use through a partnership between TAMU-CC and History Associates, Inc. Thanks to History Associates' work, the papers are more efficiently organized and described. and the photographs, audiovisual materials, and correspondence contained in the papers have been digitized.



C O L L E C T I O N S

**Special Collections and Archives, Mary and Jeff Bell Library, Texas A&M University Corpus Christi**

**Murphy Givens South Texas** papers – Contain photographs and negatives of draft registration, Naval Air Station candidates, and rationing registration.

**Santiago Hernandez** papers - Consist of a variety of original correspondence and photocopied newspaper clippings central to the attempt to rename the Three Rivers Post Office after Pvt. Felix Z. Longoria Jr. A local resident of Three Rivers, Texas, Longoria was killed in action in the Pacific Theater during World War II. When his body was returned to Three Rivers the local funeral home declined to provide services. The resulting controversy over segregation caused a national response and helped launch the fledgling GI Forum into the national consciousness.

**Lloyd Howard** Photographs – “Day in the life” style photos of time spent training at the Ward Island Naval Air Technical Training Center.

**Esther Bonilla Read** Mexican American World War II Oral History Collection - Includes a series of mini-cassette tapes and transcripts of World War II Mexican American veterans and people of that era interviewed by Esther Bonilla Read in preparation for her writing a book on the subject.

**Kenneth McCaleb** Papers – Documents and artifacts from war correspondent and veteran Kenneth McCaleb dating 1939-1945.

**Elisa Medina Munoz** Scrapbooks - News clippings of Coastal Bend Men and Women who Served in World War II

**Ward Island** Deed and Documents - The collection includes Ward Island maps, deeds, mineral leases, newspaper clippings, mechanic and transfer liens and correspondence pertaining to these documents.

**South Texas Archives, Jernigan Library, Texas A&M University Kingsville**

**Benjamin F. Wilson Jr. Collection** - Col. Benjamin F. Wilson Jr. was born July 4, 1913, he was the third child of Judge Benjamin F. Wilson Sr. and Alice Warnock Wilson. He attended the University of Texas and graduated from Texas A&I University (then College) in 1940 with a MBA degree. Ben Jr. married Florence Collins in Kingsville in 1941. He was mobilized when the Texas National Guard, 36th Division was called into Federal service. He served throughout World War II in North Africa, Italy, and the European operations. Awarded the Bronze Star in 1945, Ben Jr. returned home to Kingsville.



COLLECTIONS

American Heritage World War II Town Hall, Nueces County Veterans Services

**Lieutenant Commander Phil Perabo Jr. Collection** — Documents include aircraft action reports of dogfights, Silver Star citation from the Secretary of the Navy, telegram informing parents of POW status, and photographs.



**Sargent Jose Noe Mendez Collection** — Born in Tampico, Mexico in

1925, he and his parents immigrated to Benavides, Texas. He came to Corpus Christi at age 17 to study aircraft engine repair, and was hired to work at the Corpus Christi airport inspecting civil air patrol aircraft. In 1944 he was drafted in the U.S. Army. He fought in the European theater, and was assigned to a 40 mm anti-aircraft gun. He fought in the Battle of the Bulge, and took part in relieving Bastogne. Later he was wounded by a German grenade and recovered aboard a hospital ship in the English Channel. Recovering from his wounds, he was sent to Cologne, Germany, then to Nuremberg, where he later served as a guard for the Nuremberg trials. He was awarded the Bronze Star with three Battle Stars, Purple Heart, Battle of the Bulge, and European Theater, among other citations. Collection includes biography, photographs, newspaper clippings, stamps, and postcards of European theater.





COLLECTIONS

Port Aransas Preservation and Historical Association and the Port Aransas Museum

World War II collections - Coast Guard photographs, church bulletins, coastal defense layout, Community Church bulletins to honor service of Port Aransas citizens in war efforts, image of SS John Worthington, 1942 newspaper clipping Fort Worth Star-Telegram, "Sub Seen Off Port Aransas." The Port Aransas Museum has the original collection of photographs of every Islander in 1942 in its archives. As the number of servicemen outnumbered the 500 or so permanent residents a photographer was employed to photograph every local child and adult for security purposes.

*Images: 1942 newspaper clipping; Coast Guard Station during World War II; Coastal Defense Gun, Battery 155, Port Aransas Emplacement #2 Mound. Source: Port Aransas Preservation and Historical Association; Port Aransas Museum.*



VOLUNTEERISM / SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

**American Gold Star Mothers** — A local chapter was organized in 1946 in Corpus Christi by mothers who lost sons and daughters in wars. During World War II, mothers displayed service flags for family members who served in the armed forces. On the flag, a Blue Star signified living members, and a Gold Star honored family members who died, making the supreme sacrifice. Today, the organization’s purpose is to foster a sense of obligation to the community, state and nation, and to raise funds for charity and memorial to war dead. *Source: American Gold Star Mothers, Inc.*

**American GI Forum of South Texas**, 1526 19th St. – Founded on March 26, 1948 in Corpus Christi, by Dr. Hector Perez Garcia, an Army veteran medical doctor, to help break down barriers Hispanic Americas returning from war faced. Every 10 years, since 1948 the National Convention of the American GI Forum is hosted by the Hector P. Garcia Chapter of Corpus Christi, Texas, the first chapter and the birthplace of the American GI Forum of Texas and of the United States. The AGIF is the largest federally chartered Hispanic veterans organization in the United States. It addresses problems of discrimination and inequities endured by Hispanic veterans.

**American Legion Post 364**, 5323 Kostoryz Rd.

**American Legion Post 2397**, VFW Hall

**American Legion Post 2502**, E. Kenedy Avenue, Kingsville

**Blue Star Mothers of America** - Founded in 1942, the service organization is open to mothers and fathers who have or have had children serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. The Texas Coastal Bend Chapter was formed on April 1, 2003, and is Texas’ first chapter.

**Disabled American Vets**, 4646 Corona Dr.

**Gold Star Wives of America** — In 1946, Gold Star Wives of World War II was founded for and by military surviving spouses to collectively work to improve benefits. Marie Jordan Speer, a Corpus Christi resident, was the founder of the organization and served as the first President. Her husband Edward Jordan died in combat near Alsdorf, Germany in 1944, and she witnessed the grief and financial suffering as a war widow. She formed the organization in her apartment in New York City. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt was an original signer of the original chapter. The name was later changed to Gold Star Wives of America. Speer was an ever present representative at veteran’s events in the Coastal Bend. In 2019, Marie died at age 98 and is buried at Arlington National Cemetery. Today there are 35 chapters of Gold Star Wives of America. *Photo: GSW*

**Military VIP**, 3232 US Hwy 77

**Navy League of the United States**, 4006 San Fernando Pl

**Texas Paralyzed Veterans of America (TPVA) South Texas Chapter**, 4531 Ayers St., Ste 228





VOLUNTEERISM / SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

United Corpus Christi Chamber of Commerce *Images: UCCCoFC, NAS-CC*



The United Corpus Christi Chamber of Commerce has a long-standing tradition of support for Naval Air Station-Corpus Christi, the Corpus Christi Army Depot, Coast Guard Sector Corpus Christi, and Naval Air Station-Kingsville. As a mission, the Chamber will continue to find ways to support South Texas military in all its endeavors.

In 1939, Corpus Christi was selected as the site of a new Naval Air Station. The Corpus Christi Chamber of Commerce (as it was then known) voted to underwrite the cost of the land selected for the new base for \$50,000. That was the beginning of the Chamber's relationship with Naval Air Station Corpus Christi.

WINGINGS

Since 1941, the Chamber has provided the Wings of Gold for every aviator graduating from basic flight training at NASCC, including the wings given to former President George H.W. Bush, who was winged at NASCC. Additionally, we have a chamber member at each winging ceremony to welcome the guests and congratulate the nation's newest aviators. We also provide a "winging certificate" which makes them an honorary Corpus Christian.

In-Docs

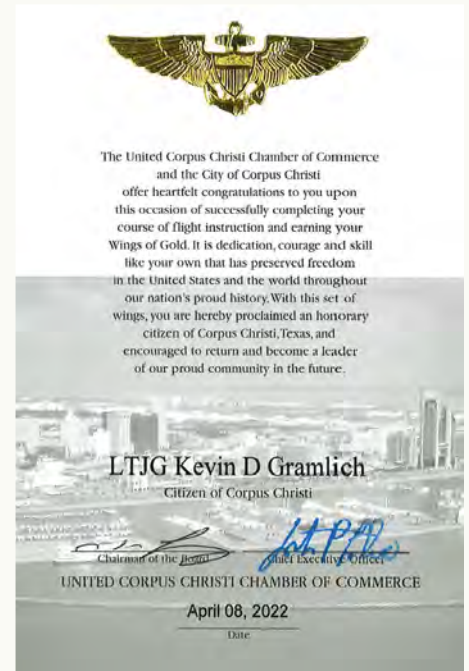
Every week, the Chamber welcomes new student pilots to NASCC during their indoctrination class. A member of the Chamber staff welcomes the student to Corpus Christi, answers questions and distributes information about our area.

South Texas Military Facilities Task Force

Part of the Chamber's core mission is to protect our South Texas Military installations. To this end, we created a special committee known as the South Texas Military Task Force. The Task Force is made up of business and community leaders and their mission is to raise awareness of the importance of our own military bases in our community and to advocate on their behalf at the local, state and federal level.

Salute to the Military

Held every summer, this signature event allows the Chamber to celebrate our military family in Corpus Christi and honor their service and sacrifice. There are typically around 600 in attendance including enlisted members and officers from all our local branches of the military.



Wings Displayed for Winging Ceremony



NAS CC Winging Ceremony



Salute to the Military



VOLUNTEERISM / SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

USO South Texas— Corpus Christi is home to the 2nd oldest United Service Organization (USO) in the world, chartered by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, April 4, 1941. That same year the City built the USO building at 100 N. Shoreline, which later served as a County Tax office, an annex for City Hall. Renovated in 2000, the building is now home to the Art Center of Corpus Christi, a prime destination for both artists and art lovers. The USO South Texas continues its mission keeping military service members connected to family, home and country, housed at Building 3, at Naval Air Station—Corpus Christi. *Source: Art Center Corpus Christi; Southtexasuso.org.*

**USS Lexington Museum by the Bay Volunteer Association** - Hosts CV-16 Association of former crew every four years. The Association has former crew from 1943-1991.

Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 2375, 1600 N 14th St., Kingsville

Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 2937, 4441 Ayers St.

Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 2837, 12030 Leopard St.

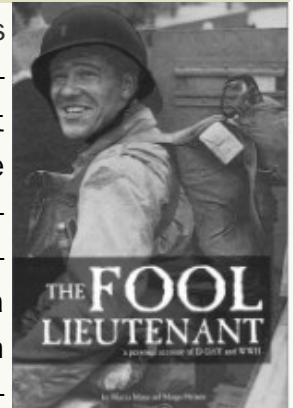
Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 8932, 702 Jester Street

Photo: John Frederick “Doc” McGregor Corpus Christi Public Libraries Digitized Collections



## PUBLICATIONS

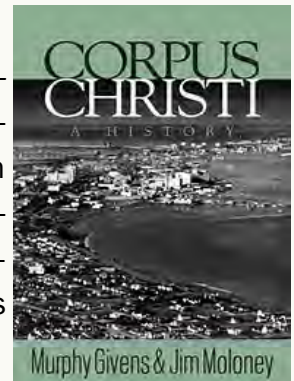
Margo Heinen and Marcia Moen published *The Fool Lieutenant*, Robert T. Edlin's personal account of D-Day and World War II. **Robert T Edlin**, known as the 'Fool Lieutenant' was First Lieutenant in Company A, 2nd Ranger Battalion and was the first American soldier to board a landing craft in Weymouth Harbour. On June 6, 1944 he led his platoon on to Omaha Beach and was wounded in both legs. He was evacuated to England but then re-joined his platoon in France on July 15, 1944. On September 9, 1944, he led a four man reconnaissance patrol to check the defenses of a German garrison near the French town of Le Conquet. He then captured the officer in charge of a pillbox and forced the officer to take him to the commander of the garrison. On entering the commander's office he pulled the pin on a grenade and held it to the commander's stomach forcing him to surrender the garrison and approximately 800 German soldiers. He was recommended for the Medal of Honor but declined this in order to remain with his platoon. After the war, the Edlin family later migrated to South Texas from Indiana. Shortly after his death in 2005 he was posthumously awarded the Texas Legislative Medal of Honor. He was a 1995 US Army Ranger Hall of Fame inductee, and a decorated World War II veteran receiving the Distinguished Service Cross, Silver Star, Bronze Star with oak leaf cluster, and 3 Purple Hearts. In October of 2000, he was honored by the City of Corpus Christi by having "Robert Edlin Day" which recognized him for his life-long accomplishments. Sources: *Weymouth Museum in Weymouth, England; Caller Times*.



**Felix Longoria's Wake: Bereavement, Racism, and the Rise of Mexican American Activism.** Private First Class Felix Longoria earned a Bronze Service Star, a Purple Heart, a Good Conduct Medal, and a Combat Infantryman's badge for service in the Philippines during World War II. Yet the only funeral parlor in his hometown of Three Rivers, Texas, refused to hold a wake for the slain soldier because "the whites would not like it." Almost overnight, this act of discrimination became a defining moment in the rise of Mexican American activism. **Patrick Carroll** provides the account of the Longoria controversy and its far-reaching consequences. Drawing on extensive documentary evidence and interviews with many key figures, including Dr. García and Mrs.

Longoria, Carroll explains why the Longoria incident, though less severe than other acts of discrimination against Mexican Americans, ignited the activism of a whole range of interest groups from Argentina to Minneapolis. Source: [www.tshaonline.org](http://www.tshaonline.org); [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

**Corpus Christi—A History**, by historians **Jim Maloney and Murphy Givens**, was published in 2011, and documents stories of the people who strove to make South Texas their home. This history features the impact of World War II on the city's growth and its society — the building of the Naval Air Station, the nation's first blackout during World War II, home-front activities supporting the war effort and Gulf Coast industries critical to the war effort. A *Caller—Times* columnist, Givens chronicled Corpus Christi history in more than 100 newspaper columns.



## PUBLICATIONS

Esther Bonilla Read, author of *After the Blessing: Mexican American Veterans of WWII Tell Their Own Stories*, interviewed 100 World War II Mexican Americans, and told their accounts of the war.

Many Catholic families blessed their children before they left home. *After the Blessing* tells the stories of many young Mexican Americans who left home to fight for their country. During the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920), many families fled Mexico to prevent their underage sons from being forced to fight. Ironically, the offspring of these immigrants often ended up across the ocean in a much larger war. Despite the bias and mistreatment most Mexican Americans faced in the US, some 500,000 fought bravely for their country during World War II. Their stories range from hair-raising accounts of the Battle of the Bulge to gut-wrenching testimony about cannibalism in the Pacific. In *After the Blessing* Mexican Americans reveal their experiences in combat during WWII—stories that have rarely been told.



Esther Bonilla Read has published columns and stories in anthologies and in a number of newspapers, including the San Antonio Express and the Dallas Morning News. She lives in Corpus Christi.

Sources: *Nueces County Historical Commission.*, [www.tamupress.com](http://www.tamupress.com)

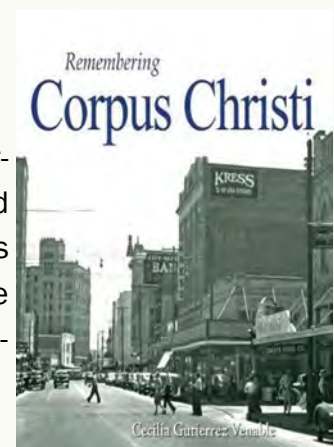
Military historian **Norman C. Delaney** authored several publications resulting from his research and oral history interviews on the building of what would become the world's largest naval air station that played a critical role in the air war against Japan during World War II:

**An Oral History of the Naval Air Station Corpus Christi during World War II.** Department of Defense Legacy Resource Management Program, U.S. Department of Defense (Washington D.C.), 1995.

**“Corpus Christi’s ‘University of the Air,’”** *Naval History Magazine*, vol. 27, no. 3, May 2013.

His academic career included 39 years teaching at Del Mar College, Corpus Christi, Texas, and adjunct professor at the Naval War College for 13 years at the Naval Air Station—Corpus Christi.

**Cecilia Gutierrez Venable**, a historian and archivist for the Sisters of the Holy Spirit and Mary Immaculate, published **Historic Photos of Corpus Christi** in 2008, and **Remembering Corpus Christi** in 2010, that chronicle the development of Corpus Christi from a 19th century trading post to a major city in Texas. Topics include farming and ranching, the railroad, port, Naval Air Station, and the oil and gas industry that aided Corpus Christi in realizing its growth potential.





## PUBLICATIONS

**From Omaha Beach to Dawson's Ridge: The Combat Journal of Captain Joe Dawson**, by Cole C Kingseed, relates the account of Joseph T. Dawson, an infantry company commander in the U.S. Army's heralded 1st Infantry Division, who led his men through some of the most brutal battles of World War II. Dawson enlisted in 1942 as a private. He later graduated from Officer Candidate School in March of 1942. He was assigned to the First Division as a second lieutenant. In August 1942, he was sent to North Africa on the coast of Algeria. In Tunisia they encountered Field Marshall Rommel of the German Military and made them surrender. Promoted to Captain after these two military battles, Dawson was sent to Omaha beach and was the first officer to reach the bluff. After he mended from being shot at Colleyville-sur-Mer, he was sent to France where he was involved in numerous battles. Dawson and G and I Company defended what would later be known as "Dawson's Ridge" during the battle of Aachen in Germany. His heroism while holding off the Germans on the ridge is legendary and the companies received the Presidential Unit Citation. He was hospitalized after this battle, but promoted to Lieutenant Colonel. He received the Distinguished Service Cross, Purple Heart with Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster, American Defense Service Medal, American Campaign Medal, European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with 4 Bronze Stars, World War II Victory Medal, Army of Occupation Medal, Presidential Unit Citation and Combat Infantryman Badge. After the war, he returned to Corpus Christi, where he continued his career as a geologist, working to develop oil and gas reserves in the region until just before his death.



Dawson describes the strain of constant combat and its effect on the combat infantryman. His writings were edited by the former chief military historian at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, Col. Cole C. Kingseed, who masterfully describes Dawson's combat leadership. The book was published by the Naval

Institute Press, in cooperation with the Association of the U.S. Army. Dawson is commemorated with a statue at Joseph T. Dawson Elementary School, Corpus Christi, that hosts a Patriotic Day to remember the school's namesake.

Source: [MilitaryHallofHonor.com](http://MilitaryHallofHonor.com)

Photos: Book cover, *From Omaha Beach to Dawson's Ridge* – General Dwight Eisenhower pins the Distinguished Service Cross on Dawson; Joseph T. Dawson Elementary School, CCISD.



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Source: Dr. James Pruitt

## C U L T U R A L   E V E N T S

**Hector! The Musical**—This homegrown Hip Hop musical portrays the life of Dr. Hector P. Garcia. Performed during the Frontera Festival. Heidi Hovda, creator.

**Salute to the Military**— Annual luncheon sponsored by the United Corpus Christi Chamber of Commerce.

**USS Lexington Museum on the Bay Annual Stage Door Canteen**— A World War II style dance honoring the commissioning of the ship. Attendees are encouraged to wear their 1940s era fashion.

**USS Lexington Museum on the Bay Educational Programs and Overnight Camp**— Teaches students of all ages about the history of the ship.

## O B S E R V A N C E S / C E R E M O N I E S

### Memorial Day

Memorial Day is observed at multiple locations across the city of Corpus Christi. The Veterans Band of Corpus Christi plays as part of the salute to fallen heroes at Sherrill Park. Other ceremonies are held at area cemeteries including Rose Hill Memorial Park, Coastal Bend State Veterans Cemetery, Seaside Memorial Park. A wreath-laying ceremony is held at the USS Lexington Museum on the Bay. Residents are encouraged to observe Memorial Day by flying a flag,



wearing a red poppy, which can be obtained from a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars or American Legion posts, and decorating graves of veterans with flags, poppies, or roses.

### Veterans Day

The Rotary Club of Corpus Christi places flags along the Bayfront on Ocean Drive to honor those who served our country as well as local heroes. In 2021, approximately 1500 flags were displayed from Doddridge Park to Cole Park. Persons are encouraged to Honk for your Heroes from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. Taps is played next to the Aviator's Statue at Ropes Park.

Sponsored by Military VIP, the Coastal Bend Field of Honor pays tribute to those military personnel who gave the ultimate sacrifice. For a donation, a flag is displayed at the Richard M. Borchard Fairgrounds.

Texas A&M University— Corpus Christi also hosts Veterans Day Celebrations and events.

*Photos: Todd Yates/Caller Times file; Rotary Club*

### USS Lexington Museum on the Bay Ceremonies

In addition to the Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day Ceremony, Veterans Day Ceremony, Memorial Day Ceremony, the Museum hosts local base military ceremonies all year round including promotions, wing pinning, retirements, and change of command.



NUECES COUNTY  
AND  
CITY OF CORPUS CHRISTI



Contact:  
Nueces County Veterans Services  
602 N. Staples, Suite 180  
Corpus Christi, Texas 78401  
J.J. De La Cerda, Jr, Sgt., USMC  
Director of Veterans Services and VSO  
Phone: 361-888-0820  
Email: [juan.delacerda@nuecesco.com](mailto:juan.delacerda@nuecesco.com)

Program Material:  
Nina Nixon-Mendez, FAICP  
Historic Preservation Officer  
City of Corpus Christi Development Services Dept.  
P.O. Box 9277  
Corpus Christi, TX 78469-9277  
Phone: 361-826-3276  
Email: [NinaM@cctexas.com](mailto:NinaM@cctexas.com)

American Heritage  
World War II  
1939 - 1945  
Town Hall  
April 8, 2022 from 10am - 12pm  
Del Mar College Center for  
Economic Development, Room 106  
3209 S. Staples St., Corpus Christi, TX  
Contact:  
Nueces County Veterans Services  
361-888-0820  
Come share your local  
World War II History with us!

The poster features a background image of soldiers in a trench during World War II. The text is overlaid on this image, with a small graphic of a classical building (Town Hall) between the years and the event name.

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

- Cecilia Venable, Sisters of the Holy Spirit and Mary Immaculate
- City of Corpus Christi Landmark Commission
- City of Corpus Christi Public Libraries
- Dr. James Pruitt
- Naval Air Station Corpus Christi
- Nueces County Coastal Parks
- Nueces County Historical Commission
- Nueces County Veterans Services
- Port Aransas Museum
- Port Aransas Preservation and Historical Association
- Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Special Collections and Archives, Mary and Jeff Bell Library
- Texas A&M University-Kingsville, South Texas Archives, Jernigan Library
- United Corpus Christi Chamber of Commerce
- *USS Lexington* Museum by the Bay