

# Ready, Set, Airlift! Ep. 8 Brig. Gen. Russell Driggers

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**Julian Hernandez (Host):** Greetings, everyone. Thank you for joining us on Ready, Set, Airlift, the official podcast of the 433rd Airlift Wing. I'm your host, Julian Hernandez, a member of the Wing Public Affairs team. On today's episode, we're going to discuss the Alamo Wing's role as one of the many mission partners here at Joint Base San Antonio.

We'll also get a little behind the scenes insight and background about what it takes to run one of the largest military installations in the country. Our guest is in a prime position to weigh in on that, plus he's sharing some of the lessons he's learned throughout his almost 30 years of service as a fighter pilot and leader in the Air Force.

Remember to stick around after the interview for some announcements ahead of the April UTA. But without further ado, here's my conversation with the commander of the 502nd Air Base Wing and JBSA, Brigadier General Russell Driggers.

Sir, thank you for making the time. I think I'm going to want to start off with quite possibly the easiest question of the day. Why did you join the Air Force?

**Brig. Gen. Russell Driggers:** So I was five or six years old. My dad was Army and he was a helicopter pilot in the Army.

We were stationed at Fort Wainwright and Looked up in the sky and I saw a force ship of A 10s fly over from Eielson Air Force Base, and I pointed at him and I said, That looks really cool, dad. I'd like to do that one of these days. What do I do to do that? And he said, Join the Air Force. I said, okay, and then what do I need to do?

How do I get there? And he and he took the opportunity to make all the plugs. He said You need to go to college and I said what's college and he said it's the school after the school after the school after the school you're in and Then I said, well, okay, where do I do that? And he said you should go to the Air Force Academy if you want to fly because that's where that's where you're gonna have your best opportunity and so that's Kind of how it got started.

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** Fascinating. And even that early point, did you ever conceive that you might be a general commanding an installation one day?

**Brig. Gen. Russell Driggers:** No, my, my whole focus was one getting to the Air Force Academy, you know, as a kid, and then and then two was trying to get to pilot training and then and then hopefully doing well enough in pilot training to be able to get the aircraft that I wanted, which I was very fortunate.

And so I went on to fly the F 15 and that was my focus. You know, as out of every one of us in our career comes to a point where we have to start thinking about what the, what's next afterwards. And I did have a kind of growing passion for the study of leadership and the practice of leadership. And so I kind of started looking at, I'd be, I'd like to be a squadron commander one of these days.

And then since then it's been serving at the pleasure of the air force and try just trying to do the best job I can to serve.

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** Having all this experience now under your belt, if you could talk to your younger self, what would be some points of advice you might give yourself?

**Brig. Gen. Russell Driggers:** Nobody's path in the Air Force is is set, and so when you're told, hey, this is the normal way that folks go, that may be the case, but My career has had a number of twists and turns and unexpected places that where we've landed that quite frankly turned out to be a path that's Given me a whole lot of experiences that I actually use every single day in this particular job.

So just knowing that Even if something happens, That's not expected. That's okay. Cause there's, there's going to be the opportunity to learn from it and then grow from the experience.

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** So I want to transition now to talking a little bit about your current role as the installation commander for joint base, San

Antonio, a little bit of a twofold question to orient our listeners who maybe aren't connoisseurs of the military lingo and the specifics of, of what that all means.

Right? So number one, what is joint base, San Antonio, and then from there. Why has the military moved to this joint base concept versus I think a lot of people are we're used to maybe the individual installations, right? You're Fort Sam Houston or Lackland Air Force Base being individual bases

**Brig. Gen. Russell Driggers:** So there's two parts to this and and what I do is I think the how I speak with our civic Population is probably a good way to introduce the joint base So, I have two hats.

I have I'm the Joint Base San Antonio Commander and a 502nd Air Base Wing Commander. To the civics, the best way for me to, to describe it is I'm kind of the military mayor. Of San Antonio. And in that role, I have a police chief just like any mayor would have the police chief headquarters is as at JBSA Randolph.

And he's got a precinct at each of our major locations. I've got a public works director. His headquarters is at Fort Sam Houston, and he's got office space to do all the things public works do everything from roads to building repairs to to building construction. I've also got a HR director who's headquartered also at Fort Sam and that does all the personnel and policy type stuff for the base with, with offices at each of the main locations.

He also owns all of our morale, welfare, recreation, and you know, the bowling alley and all those kinds of type of activities. And then I've got a communications and logistics director who's headquartered at JBSA Lackland. And has our communication squadron, our logistics readiness squadron the airfield operations at Kelly, and then another squadron at Randolph that does training equipment development.

So that's kind of it helps the local community understand my role. Then I tell them I have 266 mission partners, and that would be akin to, say, the headquarters of USAA in San Antonio. USAA has got its own headquarters, its own chain of command, its own operating structure, but Mayor Nuremberg provides all of the public works and all the security and all that kind of stuff through the city to support them, and that's the same way we run.

So everybody that works for me under my, my chain of command is under the 502nd Air Base Wing chain of command, but I also represent Joint Base San

Antonio as an entity to the community. And so that's kind of how it's set up and, and how we're structured. Joint basing stood up around 2008 during the Base Realignment and Closure Commission.

affectionately known as BRAC. BRAC is basically a congressionally mandated effort for a team to go around and look at missions and bases. An eye towards finding ways to consolidate, realign, or close so out of brack, you know, for example a lot of the military medical training got centralized here to San Antonio.

And so all services now their, all the enlisted medical training occurs at Fort Sam Houston and at Camp Bullis and to a degree also at Lackland with a 59th. One of the initiatives out of the 2008 BRAC process was to stand up 12 joint bases. I don't know exactly how San Antonio came about the going in assumption behind joint basing was that you would have a contiguous fence line and then similar missions.

And so, for example, a joint base Lewis McChord makes perfect sense. 18th Airborne Corps is on one side of the fence. They open up the gates, they march themselves on to a C 17 on the McCord side of things and then off, I'm sorry, the Fort Lewis side of things is where the 18th Airborne Corps march themselves on a C 17 at McCord and then off they go to, the deployment.

We don't, we break all those assumptions here at San Antonio. So for whatever, for however reason, the BRAC Commission decided that the 12th of the joint bases would be San Antonio bringing together all of the all the locations you talked about. So, we got Chapman Annex in Lackland down in the south for Sam here along with Grayson Annex and a couple others, Camp Bullis, Canyon Lake, Randolph, and Seguin Airfield.

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** So, we're talking more than 80, 000 service members, multiple separate geographic locations. Tell us a little bit about the challenge that presents being, the person in charge of all that. Compared to maybe just commanding a single installation.

**Brig. Gen. Russell Driggers:** Sure. So a lot of what you'd see in any installation, there are going to be similar problems across any installation.

You're going to have road deterioration. You're going to have especially in Texas, you're going to have AC problems, you know, in the North, you'll have heating problems. So a lot of those happen at, as they do at any place. It's the sheer size, scope and scale of, of those and trying to manage.

Getting after all those challenges and, and keeping on top of that, which is an interesting effort. I've got a super awesome team that does some amazing work to try and stay on top of all that. You know, we need to be honest, BRAC was also an effort to try and save, the American taxpayer some dollars.

And so it means that we are constantly balancing amongst limited resources. And so really trying to build the relationships and the teamwork across all of our 266 mission partners so that we can basically make the best decisions for everybody, knowing that sometimes we're going to have to say no to some folks.

And so that's, that's a bit of a challenge from time to time.

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** On the opposite side, what is something you found that's particularly rewarding of having this assignment?

**Brig. Gen. Russell Driggers:** Well, one is being able to see the. All the amazing missions that happen across joint base a San Antonio. We've got just singularly unique missions that are directly in support of our national defense.

Everything from the cyber mission with a 16th Air Force to the sole production of military working dogs. And and everything in between. So there's just some amazing things that go on and being a part of that is, is really yeah. It's very rewarding. I would also say that one of my focuses has been to try and really emphasize the joint nature of Joint Base San Antonio and to be able to bring to the fore All the joint resources that come to the table and so we've tried to do that as best as we can so that folks can build an understanding and appreciation of the different sort of the different services and what they bring to the table because when we go to fight, we're going to fight together.

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** That makes a lot of sense, but a lot of times the services it's in not in their nature to play nice together. Have you found pushback or specific difficulties in trying to. Bring that joint environment to reality.

**Brig. Gen. Russell Driggers:** You know, I, I think that our military has come a long, long way since I joined in this regard.

Yes, every service has its unique culture and the cultures are there for a reason. You know that that's when you are in, let's say, an air force context, an air force aviation context. The, the demands of that kind of fighting drive a certain cultural realities just think fighter pilot call signs, for example, that's, that's

something that is actually a, a, a necessary feature in that organization, because you could have captains in charge of majors in a formation, and the call sign is a way of giving each other credibility and breaking down some of what rank might you.

Challenges rank might create when the captain is actually the flight lead. That doesn't exactly work so well whenever you're taking a ground maneuver unit and trying to charge a hill. So the, so the cultural things are there and they're very important for each of the services to protect. But that also means that because of those differences, being able to blend them in together can sometimes be a bit of a challenge.

And it comes down to really, sometimes it's not about people wanting to protect their culture, it's just how they do business doesn't mesh cleanly. And so. We have to get creative on how we accomplish certain tasks. Some things aligned very well, how the army approaches a sexual assault response program and how the air between the army and the air force, how we both approach that really rhymes.

And, and we have found a lot of great synergy in that particular form. And there's some other areas where the army does things at a very unit based level, and it makes it a little bit difficult for us to, to work. So we just have to find ways to, to, to bring those things together as best as we can where it makes sense.

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** Those cultural differences. I've, I've definitely experienced them firsthand. I did my uniform service time in the army as an infantryman and now working for the air force as a civilian in public affairs is very different. You come from the fighter pilot side of the Air Force, have you found some cultural aspects of the other services that have stood out to you?

Maybe just that they're interesting in the way they do business?

**Brig. Gen. Russell Driggers:** Sure. Well you know, there's just little practices I think that are fascinating. Let's take the Navy, for example the Navy dormitories, they don't call dormitories or barracks, they call them ships. And you have the various Navy enlisted folks will, will run that facility as they would a naval ship.

And so whenever they get a senior officer that comes to visit, they will run a piping ceremony to bring them aboard. And really it's an important thing for

them to do because it helps them to learn and train and understand the customs and courtesies and the protocol and the, the safety and, and all the.

Procedures on how they run operations on an actual ship. So I find that really fascinating. We found with, you know, with the army that they have very much the roles that they play with the various, with, with how their leaders are, are set. Just has a little bit of a different approach to it by nature of their organization that I find fascinating.

And as the Joint Base Commander. I think our exposure to each other and an openness to learning about each other enriches our military service and actually makes us far better warfighters if, and when the balloon goes up.

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** You mentioned earlier 266 mission partners here on Joint Base San Antonio, 433rd Airlift Wing, happy to be one of those 266 mission partners.

From your perspective as the installation commander, the joint commander, tell us a little bit about what the ideal relationship between a mission partner and the host wing, in this case, the 502nd, should look like.

**Brig. Gen. Russell Driggers:** Yeah, so the ideal relationship you know, we have, Governance structure in place to where we, we have touch points at multiple locations or multiple echelons in order to have a healthy dialogue so that we understand the needs, wants and objectives that the 433rd brings to the table and what their requirements for their mission are and how best the 502nd provides the support.

And then, likewise, that conversation also comes to a 433rd understanding of the 502nd's needs and objectives and constraints so that they understand the role where, where we come to the table. And so then, we can come together to be able to provide the best we can, the services, support, and resources.

To meet the 433rd needs and then the 433rd understands and participates with the other mission partners in understanding when we have to take hard priority decisions and that we all come to the table in a joint way with the aim of making Joint Base San Antonio as a whole the best it possibly can be.

Our vision is that we are the number one place to work, train and live and everyone working towards that, vision whenever we have to make some of these decisions about prioritizations. Thank you.

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** Anytime I talk about the way something should be, I think it's always important to follow up, how is it actually, you know, and what are the real world, we don't live in a perfect world.

What are the real world frictions and frustrations that naturally come from trying to bring together 266 different organizations with tens of thousands of different members with different needs.

**Brig. Gen. Russell Driggers:** So That's a great question. Part of it is we're challenged for resources.

And when I speak resources, I'm talking money, I'm talking manpower, I'm talking time. So you may have all the humans in the world and all the money in the world, but you may not have the time to be able to do the work that's necessary. And, and you can have a little, any of those kinds of combinations. And so, you know, it, naturally is going to create.

Friction may not be the right word, but it's naturally going to create the need to have hard conversations to be able to best align resources that we have. You know, and, and in some cases I don't think it'd be accurate to think that you could just split us into thirds the way it used to be because we're actually under resourced to that.

So, we have to be able to operate, you know, across the whole of the installation so we can move resources to need when the case, when the time may be. That means that the importance of relationships and the importance of what we are talking about in the 502nd Outward Mindset. We're, we're working on this.

Discussion about mindset. Basically, like I said before, you matter like I matter and your wants, needs and objectives are just as important as mine are. And as long as we continue to foster the relationships where we are open and alive to each other's needs and objectives, then we can have the right kind of conversation to get past some of those friction points.

And then we focus on the relationships as best we can.

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** You mentioned resources and an installation as large as JBSA. Okay. It's very likely there's some resources that are possibly underutilized because people maybe don't know about them. Is there something that comes to mind that you wish more people across the installation were aware is a resource for them?

**Brig. Gen. Russell Driggers:** So I think that, you know, we do have a lot of helping resources that are out there that are available. And, you know, in some cases I think that, There are, there are chances where we have service members that might have struggles that they're trying to, trying to work through and not necessarily understanding that they've got access to, to helping resources to be able to help them get past things before it gets to a crisis point, you know, so if you've got somebody that gets themselves in a little bit of credit card debt, there's financial counseling and financial advising that's available through our military family readiness centers.

That you can get there when you are, when it's a challenge, before it becomes a struggle, and before it becomes a crisis, there's also a lot of those resources available to our families across all of the installation no service member should think that any of those are service parochial.

if it's provided at Joint Base San Antonio, it's available for all services. Even if, if you're Navy at Lackland and if you're Air Force at Fort Sam, no, it's all available for folks. And so I'll put a plug in for the JBSA Connect app to be able to have folks understand what's out there on the resources.

It's a, It's a great app where we're constantly evolving and improving to be able to help connect our JBSA family members and teammates to the resources at the

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** installation. That

brings up a good point. You know, it's at some point everybody's new to an installation, even yourself when you first took on this assignment.

What is something you wish you had known when you were new to the installation as like a resource for newcomers?

**Brig. Gen. Russell Driggers:** That's a really good question. So to, I'll be honest, I, I got a lot of help coming here. So um, maybe I'm not best example, but I think now if, if you were to ask somebody arriving there is a arrive and thrive program that is in place.

And so I would hope that folks are getting onto the jbsa. mil website learning about the arrive and thrive and participating. Six months out, we have a virtual basically kind of webinar. Where we start talking about all of the resources that are available at joint by san antonio get folks to understand what's at the various operating locations and and how best they can access that.

So I think if I were to. Canvas folks that maybe didn't know that that was available, I think they would have liked to have been able to six months prior plug in and start learning about joy based san antonio and understanding a little better

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** moving to a new installation is also moving and becoming part of a new community in your experience.

Can you compare and contrast the community here at JBSA to other installations where you've worked?

**Brig. Gen. Russell Driggers:** Sure. So, two aspects to that. There's, there is the, the military community that's works with the service members who are working on any of our various JBSA locations. That one's an interesting one because You know, as much as we want to make joint base, San Antonio, a, an integral thing.

And, you know, so we'll, you know, some of our big events, we can't hold all big events at all locations. And so we'll centralize to, for example, October fest here at Fort Sam or fall fest at Lackland and and, and the like to be able to get folks to be able to, explore the installation and be able to see that.

But that's tough. I mean, geography matters and, you know, where you live matters and that, and we have to take that into account for its reality in the services that we provide. And so where we can provide exquisite capability, then we do that. So for, you know, a perfect example would be the, auto hobby shop down at Lackland.

We just don't have the money to be able to do that same kind of thing elsewhere. So that's, that's a really good example of, Where we've done that but having the community willing to or explore and find those niche capabilities or where we have capabilities that are spread across. We have three military family readiness centers available for our community.

On the outside the wire in our local community, you've got a support base that is unlike anything I've ever seen. the city literally trademarked military city USA. Okay. And so the, so San Antonio and all of the surrounding communities really have approached continue to approach us with open arms asking how they can help take care of the military.

And celebrate the military.

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** You read my mind. I was heading towards that military city USA part of the conversation. And so on that note, you referenced earlier, you're kind of like the mayor of JB SA. I'm sure you work closely with Mayor Nirenberg here in San Antonio. Can you talk about some of those, like you said, the communities got the open arms and always asking how they can help.

Can you give us a few specific examples of that helping what it looks like?

**Brig. Gen. Russell Driggers:** Absolutely. I would love to. So one of the organizations that we have is we, now we kind of affectionately call it the alliance. It started out as the JVSA Workforce and Transition Alliance. It's headed up by Serafina de los Santos who is the for support group civilian deputy.

It's a collection of over, I think we're, we're north of, certainly north of 160, I think we're north of 200 different organizations from around the community. Businesses, veteran service organizations, hospitals other service providers all coming together in this alliance to be able to provide not only support to veterans, but also support to transitioning service members as they as they depart service.

And so that, that network is amazing. It's very solid and very, very responsive. That has been something that's unique to San Antonio. Another one is the you know, the partnerships we have with, for example with our security forces. We are tied in with the local law enforcement fusion center.

And so, I mean, it's, we have people that are there at the fusion center. And so from a law enforcement perspective, we have very robust coordination and communication. We enjoy the same with our fire department and with our EMS services. So. That, that level of cooperation is stronger than I've, I've ever seen before.

And we also are partnering with the city in a number of different areas. So the Ready to Work San Antonio is one of the initiatives that Mayor Nurberg has invested heavily in. We are a participant on both sides of that program. So we encourage our service members. We educate our service members to party service to take advantage of the SA ready to work for training purposes.

And then we also serve on the backside as a hiring authority to bring folks on board. And then the last one is we just signed a memorandum of understanding with the city and CPS energy to pursue some long lead time resilient forms of

energy. So think geothermals, think new nuclear technologies to be able to get some power generation that's uh, secure

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** As a military minded folks, anytime, you know, we have these kinds of conversations, I'd like to think, okay, like the ARA, the after action review, it sounds like we have a lot of sustains. Things are going well, but there's always some improves out there, right? What are some things that you would

**Brig. Gen. Russell Driggers:** like to see improve I

think that one of the areas that we, need to continue to invest our energy in is, again, we have a lot of resources to provide our service members and their families to, to build resilience. Okay. We have a lot and we have a lot of folks that really want to come to the table and help rationalizing that and understanding what that spectrum looks like is hard to do.

And I think that it's not for a lack of resources. I think it's for a lack of visibility and simplicity and understanding what all is out there. And so one of the things that I'm hoping that. That you know, I'll pass on to my successor is an effort to truly to really lay that flat so that it's easy for folks to understand where and how and when to get resources,

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** bringing it back to your Air Force career.

You know, I think a lot of airmen. We'll never, unfortunately, get the opportunity to, to speak with a general and get that perspective and wisdom. You know, they may hear them at a change of command ceremony, but never really that one on one. If you had an opportunity to sit one on one with some airmen, what are some things you'd want to pass on to them?

**Brig. Gen. Russell Driggers:** You know, I think that uh, when we all join, there's a somewhat tactical Maybe thinking and reasoning for why we serve. And I think that it's, worth it for airmen to take a look at why we serve them. Purpose matters. And you think Simon Sinek start with why and really kind of getting why is it that I'm willing to do this and think through some of that?

Because I mean, military service involves sacrifice, Every day in some small form of sacrifice by putting on the same type of clothes instead of having choice to maintaining standards of appearance all those amounts of small sacrifices that are practiced for the big sacrifice if we ever had to when in a deployed environment.

And really understanding why we serve and what we're defending, I think is, is valuable. investment for, anyone who, who wants to do this life. And then how they're plugged into the mission. I would also talk to them about, you know, sometimes we need to sit back and think a little bit about the value of trust in military service.

We have a lot of folks out there that. We'll believe a lot of bad things that are said about others, usually in social media. And I think a healthy grain of trust instead of seed of doubt is a good thing and start with maybe this person is worthy of my trust and then see where the thinking might take you.

You'd be surprised that you'll be a lot more forgiving of folks, being a lot more Accepting a mistakes and be a lot more focused on the mission and cooperating to get after the missions that that are so important for us to get after

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** you alluded to it earlier in your career, the Air Force and the military as a whole have changed a lot.

What are some of those changes that have stood out the most to you?

**Brig. Gen. Russell Driggers:** I alluded to one of them, you know, when I first came in you know, we talked a lot about barry goldwater nichols act and we, we reflected on some of the changes that came with bringing in purple and joint and all that.

But in the 20 plus, or well, a lot more years, but in all the years where we have been actively employed in a joint manner fighting the global war on terror. We've broken down a whole lot of silos, and so I see us in a place right now where we are far more joint than we sometimes even realize.

You know, we, we talk about the friction created by the different service cultures and all that kind of stuff. But I think we're saying those things and we're focused on those. That's 1 percent of the challenge whenever 99%, I could have the numbers a little bit off, but if you really take a look at how, how joint we are in terms of cooperating, working together and, and having a good relationships across the services, it is, Night and day from what it used to be a while back, I think that the other thing that's changed obviously is just the, the pace of technological change is bringing about with it, you know, societal change, it's bringing about with it cultural change as to what various Generations value and how they're brought up to think about certain things and so there's always a requirement This is as old as old as anything. There's there is a requirement that. we continue to engage and seek to understand each other

across any of these things that would otherwise divide us because there is a savviness with technology that exists with anybody that's coming up in a junior in the ranks and they are the ones that are going to be able to teach.

You know, across the force about how to leverage that technology to to help us win if we have to fight,

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** that is what I had on my list. Sir, did you have any aspects you wanted to highlight or parts of the conversation? We didn't touch on, Otherwise.

**Brig. Gen. Russell Driggers:** No, I appreciate you letting me have a chance to to talk with you, I'm really, you know, think that the 433rd has an amazing mission, you know, to get out there and, and do the work that they're doing.

And it really is a global mission. Not just not only training, but doing, doing the lift that that they, they get tasked with. And so it's an honor to have them as part of Joint Base San Antonio, have you all as part of Joint Base San Antonio and thanks for letting me have a little bit of time to talk with you.

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** Absolutely. Brigadier General Russell Driggers, installation commander here at Joint Base San Antonio. Thank you so much for your time, sir. Thank you.

**Julian Hernandez (Host):** Before we go, here are some of the announcements ahead of the April UTA. The Great Texas Air Show is happening this weekend at Joint Base San Antonio Randolph. Gates open at 09 and the show begins at 1100. The Alamo Wing is happy to support the airshow with a C 5 static display and a flyover. Keep an eye out for us if you manage to find your way out to JBSA Randolph.

For more details, visit [jbsa.mil](http://jbsa.mil). There will be an NCO induction ceremony Saturday of the UTA at 1500 inside the IAFA auditorium. Look for more information in your military emails. Congratulations to all our newest non commissioned officers being inducted. The 433rd Chiefs Group is holding a panel discussion on Sunday of the UTA at 100 inside the 68th auditorium.

The discussion is open to all airmen regardless of rank and will feature experts from multiple career fields and diverse backgrounds. And finally, if you're a fan of Girl Scout cookies, you are in luck. Get in touch with your First Sergeant for

details on getting a hold of some free cookies. And on that sweet note, we are going to wrap up this episode of Ready, Set, Airlift.

Remember to subscribe to the podcast on Apple, Spotify, or whichever platform you listen to us on. Make sure to leave us a like or a review if you're enjoying the show. We appreciate you spending some of your time with us. I've been your host, Julian Hernandez. Until next time, stay safe and stay sharp.