



BY
**ROXANA
TOFAN**



ESSENTIAL TO NATIONAL DEFENSE, THE TEXAS ECONOMY AND LOCAL EMPLOYMENT

WHAT FIRST COMES TO mind when you hear San Antonio? Is it the famous River Walk, The Alamo, the Fiesta celebrations, or the Pearl District? The seventh most populous city in the United States is the state's oldest municipality and has the only UNESCO World Heritage Site in Texas—the San Antonio Missions. And did you know that President Eisenhower proposed to his wife, Mamie, when he was a young second lieutenant, at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio? Almost 4 years ago the city celebrated 300 years, just a year after it announced ownership of the registered trademark 'Military City USA.' While the name has been associated with the city since World War II, it acquired the trademark from the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office in 2017 over cities like San Diego, Colorado Springs, and Norfolk.

as the Senior Advisor to a Military Transition Team embedded with the 1st Iraqi Army Division. As the Director of the Office of Military and Veteran Affairs for the City of San Antonio he works closely with military and civilian partners to ensure military missions and installations continue to thrive and grow in the region. I spent a couple of afternoons with General Ayala to learn more about San Antonio's impact on the Texas economy and the approximately \$105.6 million invested by the City of San Antonio over the last 15 years to support the military community and Joint Base San Antonio (JBSA) requirements.

pleted, this project will add immense value to San Antonio's military installations.

Roxana: How will the project add value and when is it expected to be completed?

Gen Ayala: By increasing utility resiliency, enhancing force protection and security around several bases, and reducing aircraft mishap hazards. The primary effort will provide backup power generation to critical potable water production facilities serving JBSA-Lackland, the National Security Agency-Texas, and 91,600 SAWS customers. Winter Storm Uri demonstrated vulnerabilities in the water supply system and resulted in system outages. The backup power project will ensure that a reliable water supply remains operational. The second phase will include the installation of reinforced stormwater crossings at five locations along JBSA's perimeter fence line. The perimeter fence represents the first line of defense and prevents unauthorized persons from seeking access to sensitive information and valuable assets on the installations. The final phase will consist of replacing overhead electrical lines with underground distribution lines in JBSA-Randolph AFB's Clear Zone. Removing vertical obstruction hazards in and around the flight path will enhance the safety of flight crews and surrounding civilian communities and increase training effectiveness. The project is expected to be completed in the next 24 months.

Roxana: After serving around the world, why retire in San Antonio?

Gen Ayala: I am a native of El Paso. My wife and I have always enjoyed this area and decided to retire in New Braunfels. I have now been with the city for 6 years and feel that after serving my country, I am now serving my community. San Antonio has a large military footprint. It is home to Joint Base San Antonio, the largest joint base in the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) and includes Randolph Air Force Base, Fort Sam Houston, Lackland Air Force Base and Camp Bullis. Every enlisted medic in the DOD is trained at JBSA; every Airman in the Air Force completes basic military training in San Antonio; Lackland Air Force Base hosts the 16th Air Force, and; Fort Sam Houston is home to the DOD's largest hospital and only Level I military Trauma Center in the country. That's just scratching the surface of what JBSA's 266 mission partners do for our nation. San Antonio is simply a great place to be.

Roxana: Tell me more about the Trauma Center.

Gen Ayala: Brooke Army Medical Center (BAMC) is a Level I trauma center that treats the most complex injuries resulting from gun shots, vehicle accidents, stabbings, and burns, all of which are war-type injuries. Our city has a unique relationship with BAMC and the local medical community since approximately 85% of the trauma patients treated at BAMC are civilians with no military affiliation. This relationship ensures that civilians receive world-class life-saving medical care. In return, military medical teams gain invaluable experience treating combat-related injuries through repetitive practice by treating a high volume of patients. This volume would not be possible treating only military



↑ General Juan Ayala with San Antonio Mayor Ron Nirenberg at The Pentagon

As I arrived at his office a bit early for my meeting, I wondered what all the excitement was all about. **Retired Major General Juan G. Ayala had served in the United States Marine Corps for 36 years.** He commanded all 24 Marine Corps installations worldwide with four combat tours in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, including a year

No one ever says, "It's only a game" when their team is winning.



↑ Marine Day at the Alamo – April 2018

members. This unique relationship greatly enhances our nation's medical readiness and our military teams' ability to save lives on the battlefield. In addition, BAMC supported the community by opening their regional trauma system to civilian patients thus freeing beds at local hospitals to treat COVID patients during the pandemic's recent surges.

Roxana: Why is the City's support important to military operations?

Gen Ayala: In my role at the City, I engage with general officers, their commanders and staffs on a regular basis regarding their operational priorities, challenges and opportunities, and how the community can help with these issues. After 36 years of service, with my last tour commanding all Marine Corps installations world-wide, I can tell you that military bases are not islands. They cannot exist without their hosting local communities. That extends to families. Approximately 80% of the uniforms stationed at Joint Base San Antonio live off base. They live and serve in our communities. They shop at our HEBs, coach little league, volunteer at our food bank, and patronize our stores and restaurants. Their kids go to the same schools as ours. They make an impact on local communities well beyond serving our country, and we work hard to ensure we provide adequate support, so they can enjoy their tours here, and one day return to make San Antonio their final home.

Roxana: Tell me top three ways the City provides support.

Gen Ayala: Infrastructure. Advocacy. And community support. The city puts their money where their mouth is, and we respond to the military's operational requests. Our support is not a bumper sticker or a saying, it is tangible. The \$105.6 million invested over the last 15 years includes funding infrastructure projects like the multi-lane corridor connection of IH-35 to Ft. Sam Houston, new storm drains and improvements to existing culverts, two-lane roads, utility road improvements, fence line repairs, and more. We advocate at the local, state, and federal levels to keep missions here, and to bring additional missions/units to the local region. The Mayor and I visit the Pentagon at least once a year, meeting with high level military and civilian officials to

discuss the City of San Antonio's willingness to support our current missions and advocate to host additional ones, to include additional National Guard missions. We want DOD to know that San Antonio knows the importance of the military. When basing decisions are made at the Pentagon, we want to make sure we remain DOD's top contender for additional missions. This aggressive advocacy has yielded positive results in recent years as evidenced by our city being selected as the home of an Air Force Special Training Wing, and the rebasing of several medical and cyber personnel. Competing with over 50 U.S. cities, were one of the top six finalists to host the new United States Space Command Headquarters. We have also advocated against threats that may have resulted in BAMC being moved to another city, assisted in drafting language on a current state law making BAMC a participating Medicaid provider, worked with local landowners to ensure Texas National Guard units did not have to leave San Antonio due to incompatible land use, and worked with environmental groups to mitigate significant bird strike threats to the life/limb of military aircrews and the local community.

Family support is one of the most important facts when military personnel decide on whether to stay in the service or transition out.

Like the general population, military families make career decisions based on the quality of schools, spouse employment, and other factors. Many military families depend on two incomes and we do our best to support them. For example, we partnered with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Hiring Our Heroes Program and have funded employment fellowships for military spouses for the last two years. We were the first city in Texas to provide funding for this program which resulted in eventual employment of nearly forty spouses. We also entered into an agreement with the U.S. Army called Partnership for Youth Success. This program guarantees transitioning soldiers a job interview for soldiers who stay in the area after their military service. The city also supports veterans through its city-chartered Commission on Veteran Affairs. The Commission is comprised of veterans representing each city district and the Mayor. Commission members advise city leaders on issues of common concern such as housing, VA benefits, employment and education. And there is much more the city does. As I've described, the military community has a significant impact on our local and state economy, and we will continue to provide the support they need so that this never changes.

The military missions performed in Military City USA are essential to national defense. JBSA hosts aviation, cyber, intelli-

gence, medical, contracting, basic military, and installation support and training. Our Level I Trauma Center is renown world-wide. Our senior Army commands play strategic and significant roles in the defense of the homeland and the defense of the Western Hemisphere. Not only is the military our top employer, the military footprint also has a significant economic impact in San Antonio and the State of Texas. The Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts (TCPA) estimates the population directly affiliated with JBSA contributed at least \$41.3 billion to the Texas economy in 2019 out of the \$127 billion for the entire state of Texas. That is a third of the total output generated by the Texas' "military industry". This was an increase from \$30.37 billion reported in 2017. The estimated contribution of JBSA to the Texas economy includes direct employment of 73,707 people and total employment of 210,998 people in 2019 which resulted in a disposable personal income of almost \$13 billion, data also obtained from the TCPA.

Commander William Barret Travis wrote his "Victory or Death" letter on February 24, 1836. He called people to action in a letter imploring "all Americans in the world" to come to his aid as he was surrounded by Santa Ana's forces at the Alamo. 186 years later, the City of San Antonio still stands strong, passionate about its history and culture, and proudly supports its military. As Mayor Ron Nirenberg often says, "The military is part of our DNA". Today, we ask every member of our community to learn about the importance of the military in our city, and if necessary, come to our aid if military missions are threatened. Reach out to your elected officials, reach out to the city's Office of Military and Veterans Affairs, invite them to inform your clubs, organizations and businesses of this gem we often take for granted. Finally, standing side by side with the men and women of the military, this city will continue to claim economic, historical and cultural VICTORY for many years to come. ■



↑ Military City USA Trademark - June 2017

Roxana Tofan is a commercial real estate and business broker and the founder and owner of Clear Integrity Group in San Antonio. She is also a Contributing Editor of **thenetwork**.
roxana@clearintegritygroup.com