

South Dakota National Guard

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SD Air Guard's Walz promoted to brigadier general, new director of the joint staff

By 2nd Lt. Jessica Bak and Tech. Sgt. Abbey Rotter
114th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

SIoux FALLS, S.D. – After leaving a 10-year legacy that includes serving as the second longest reigning commander, Russ Walz relinquished command of the South Dakota Air National Guard's 114th Fighter Wing at a May 1 ceremony at Joe Foss Field.

Moments after Col. Nathan Alholinna took command of the 114th, Walz was promoted to brigadier general and will now serve as the South Dakota National Guard's director of the joint staff at Joint Force Headquarters in Rapid City.

For 10 years, Walz led the men and women of the 114th FW through multiple changes and challenges that include the conversion to Block 40 F-16s and standing up and supporting two aerospace control alert sites.

Under Walz's command, more than 2,000 Airmen deployed to 17 countries in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation New Dawn and Operation Inherent Resolve.

"Our Airmen have a lot to be proud of," said Walz. "As I look back on the last 10 years, I'm filled with enormous pride."

Walz, who's served with the 114th since 1980, enlisted as a fire protection specialist prior to commissioning as a pilot. He's flown both the A-7D and F-16C aircraft and logged more than 3,750 total fighter hours, with over 70 combat hours in support of Operations Northern and Southern Watch.

Other assignments included the 114th Maintenance Group assistant deputy commander, commander of the 114th Operations Support Flight, 175th Fighter Squadron and the 114th Operations Group.

The 114th FW received numerous awards under the command of Walz to include: the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with six oak leaf clusters; the National Guard Association of the United States' Spaatz Trophy; the NGAUS Distinguished Flying Unit Plaque; the National Guard Bureau's Winston P. Wilson Trophy; the Air Force Association's Outstanding Air National Guard Flying Unit Award; the Air National Guard Maj. Gen. John J. Pesch Safety Award; and the Air National Guard William W. Spruance Safety Award.

In 2014, the 114th FW received the first 'Highly Effective' rating awarded by the Air Combat Command for a Unit Effectiveness Inspection.

"Our Airmen are the best of the best," Walz said to an audience of hundreds of his fellow Airmen, co-workers, friends and family.

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Amidst all of the changes over his tenure as commander, Walz said he sees the mission of the Air National Guard as something that has remained constant.

“The mission of the National Guard has not changed at all,” Walz said. “Our primary mission is to secure the home front.”

Under his leadership, the FW was involved in numerous natural disaster responses to include relief and recovery operations following the Delmont tornado and providing relief during the historical Missouri River flood.

While excited about the new opportunities that lie ahead, he said he will miss seeing his 114th FW family on a daily basis.

“For 35 years, I’ve been driving through the gate and getting the opportunity to work with amazing professionals working toward a common goal,” said Walz. “It is an organization of family and friends and is certainly something that I hope never changes.”

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High resolution photos are available at www.flickr.com/photos/southdakotationalguard



160426-Z-BZ340-035: Russ Walz was promoted to the rank of brigadier general during a ceremony at Joe Foss Field in Sioux Falls, S.D., May 1, 2016. Walz will now serve as the director of the joint staff in Joint Force Headquarters, South Dakota National Guard, in Rapid City, and as the South Dakota Air National Guard’s chief of staff. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Nancy Ausland/Released)



160501-Z-LQ671-017: Brig. Gen. Russ Walz, former 114th Fighter Wing commander, relinquished command of the unit and was recognized for his promotion to brigadier general during a ceremony at Joe Foss Field, in Sioux Falls, S.D., May 1, 2016. Walz begins his new position as director of the joint staff in Joint Force Headquarters, South Dakota National Guard, in Rapid City, and as the South Dakota Air National Guard chief of staff. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Luke Olson/Released)



160304-Z-BZ340-073: Col. Russ Walz, 114th Fighter Wing commander, salutes as he departs Joe Foss Field in Sioux Falls, S.D., for his final flight in the F-16 aircraft March 3, 2016. Walz served as the 114th Fighter Wing commander for 10 years and was promoted to brigadier general May 1. Walz will now serve as the director of the joint staff in Joint Force Headquarters, South Dakota National Guard, in Rapid City, and as the South Dakota Air National Guard’s chief of staff. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Master Sgt. Nancy Ausland/Released)

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