

Ep. 21: Social media engagement

[Narrator] Welcome to Sword and Shield, the official podcast of the 960th Cyberspace Wing. Join us for insight, knowledge, mentorship and some fun, as we discuss relevant topics in and around our wing. Please understand that the views expressed in this podcast are not necessarily the views of the U. S. Air Force, nor the Air Force Reserve, and no endorsement of any particular person or business is ever intended. (Upbeat music)

[Erredge] All right, welcome back to the Sword and Shield podcast. I'm Colonel Rick Erredge and today I'm joined by.... - [Howard] Chief master Sergeant Chris Howard. - [Erredge] And... - [Mathison] Samantha Mathison. I am the 960th Cyberspace Wing public affairs person. - [Erredge] All right. Excellent. Yeah, so most of the time Samantha is the producer, director, everything all podcasts behind kind of the microphone. - [Howard] The guru of all things. - [Erredge] The guru of all things podcasts. - [Mathison] Yeah. - [Howard] And we are dragging her grudgingly out from behind the computer and in front of the microphone, every discussion today about social media. - [Mathison] Yay. Everyone loves social media. Right? I know I do honestly, sincerely, like I really do mean that because social media is such an awesome outlet and a great way to highlight all the things that not only we're doing as a wing but all the things that all of our units are doing as well. And we have some awesome people who are out there doing these amazing things and I really wish I could be out there more and to see everything that all the Reserve Citizen Airmen are doing but unfortunately I'm one deep and I'm here at the wing level and we have our GSUs who are all across the country. And I can't obviously be in all places all at once, but I am excited to be here and to highlight the cyberspace wing airman. - [Howard] And I'll be honest with you. I'm much more anti or adverse to social media based on all of the different types of jobs I've had. So I'm definitely interested in kind of getting your perspective on how to engage in social media. What are some of the do's and don'ts because I'll be honest with you, I try to avoid it at all costs just based on, like I said the jobs that I have, where they just do not go into social media, don't reveal anything about yourself, but for those cases when we do actually get out there and communicate what are some of those do's and don'ts, right? - [Erredge] And I think I'm in the middle, so I understand why we need to do it and I appreciate doing it for work and business and connecting with airmen. But personally, I'm more on chief's side where, I just don't want to spend the time doing it, I stress a lot about if I do want to post something, that I don't want offend somebody or that I say the right thing or whatever. So for me, it's easier to not do it and just be more of a stalker and just look at stuff (Mathison laughing) and watch and listen. - [Mathison] Uh huh. And that's really common perspective. I mean, a lot of people in the military feel that way and understandably so because there's just been so many instances of people getting online and then getting in trouble unintentionally for posting something or stating an opinion, I mean, it's a rough world out there in social media land and it's where, I'll be honest with you, I live there. That's where I really enjoy being is out on social media and looking at all the memes and seeing what people

are saying, even the politics and their personal perspectives on things. I mean, it's really eye opening when you go out there, but at the same time it is pretty scary (chuckles). - [Erredge] Yeah. It's hard to, it's hard to express tone. And, you know, I grew up with having communication like, looking at people's non-verbals and trying to learn how to read people's eyes and whether or not I'm interested, they're interested in what we're saying or kind of which direction to go. And you can do that in social media. - [Howard] Right. And then things out of context. Right. So I had a coworker where we deployed and of all things, right. Because we know the Air Force is small, runs into a high school buddy. Right. So ends up snapping a picture of him and his buddy seeing each other for the first time in years, I think it was like 10 plus years, and then posting on a social media, security catches it and then bam. So what do we have? Right. We have a situation where two buddies inadvertently taking a picture. Right. But because of where it was, and some of the stuff in the background, it could have, not that it did, but it could have tip the hat of where we were at and what we were doing and why that was problematic. And then all of the things that came after that, I don't know if you've seen anything like that Sam? - [Mathison] Yeah. I mean, trust me I've got some stories myself, for instance, at my last unit there was an unintended post made by myself on behalf of the unit I was with. And man, it has some consequences I was not anticipating. So basically what happened was a group of people have performed some SARC training. And for those who don't know SARC is the Sexual Assault Response... - [Howard] Coordinator - [Mathison] Coordinator, that's it. Anyway so they had some training and they took a group photo. And so out of courtesy, the gentleman in the group had led the ladies sit down in chairs, that were, that happened to be there, so they take this group photo and they send it to me. And for me that was easy pickings for my unit and good highlight story basically. And so I put it out there and then moved on with my life. Right. Well then I noticed my phone started blowing up with comments. And so I started reading the comments but I still didn't have the full context of what was going on. Turns out, (laughs) a lot of these comments were referencing or comparing this photo that had been taken to an adult film. And I did not realize that because I don't watch adult films by any means, and so I was really when I saw these comments so of course I brought it up to my boss and I'm like, "These comments are blowing up and I'm not exactly sure what they're referencing. I just don't understand like what, what it is about this photo. Like it's just a group photo." And so finally someone was able to explain to me, "Hey like they're actually comparing this photo to this video." And I was like, "Oh no." And you cannot imagine the feeling of horror that I had once I realized (chuckles) what was happening. And so then of course we had to have that discussion how do we handle this situation now? Do these people that are commenting do they, do we block them? Do we, how do like, where do we go from here? And so we then determined like, okay, let's not feed the trolls. However, still monitoring the comments. Things were really starting to get out of line, let's just be Frank here. Some of the things that were getting posted in this feed was clearly inappropriate for what was supposed to be posted on our artificial government, Facebook page. Right? And so that's when, we had to make the determination okay, we're just going to go ahead and start blocking these people. And we blocked the main offenders and then it ended in a story. (Laughing) -

[Erredge] You go out there looking cause, once you hit send, you can't get it back. Right. - [Mathison] Yeah. (Sounds are drowned by background noise) - [Erredge] The Internet's forever, And so we gotta be really careful on what you do and you gotta be able to learn to live with whatever happens - [Mathison] Yeah. - [Erredge] and take it out of context or not. - [Mathison] Yeah. And then we did talk about too, like, well maybe we should just delete the posts, but then it came up like, well one, it's already out there on the internet. If people are screen-shotting this probably already, it's out there forever, we delete it, and then it's a way of, it appears like we are guilty of something whenever we delete anything. Right. And so that's why we decided ultimately not to do that and then honestly, it was just a few little culprits once we blocked him, it was fine. And everyone just then moved on with life. Thank goodness, yeah. (Laughing) - [Erredge] Yeah. Here in the wing, we've had our own - [Howard] Hiccups... - [Erredge] Hiccups, experience with some inappropriate engagement through social media and it didn't end well for our member. And so we had to move on from that person because that situation quickly got out of hand. The member was, our member was clearly in the wrong, in that case and so, we relied on Sam to give us a little bit of context around the situation and she helped us through that and gave us really good advice about that specific situation. And so I don't know if there's anything maybe you want to kind of highlight to start out with what people should be thinking about before they hit send. - [Mathison] Yes. Yeah, I do actually have some advice for you. So just for those out there, listening AFI 35-107 public web and social communication. This covers social media engagement. Now this isn't specifically for active duty members, this is for everyone in the air force, period. So if you're a civilian, if you're a reservist, National Guard member, it doesn't matter. And this applies to you 100% of the time. Why? No, it doesn't matter what status you're in. This applies to you. And the reason being is because this is your presence, this is an online presence yes, but it is your presence and if you are in uniform or you're working for the air force you are a representative of the air force. So it's very important to remember this. - [Erredge] That's a great point, Sam, right? (Mathison laughing) And so some people think that, hey, I'm not wearing uniform today and I can kind of do what I want because another areas are alive right, Chief? - [Erredge] That sometimes things don't apply when you're not in status. - [Howard] Correct. It's true. When you look at the status that, it really comes to your behavior on and off duty. Right? And I think that's where that catch all it turns to be when especially when talking about social media right? Because more often than not, even if you don't, there's a correlation to military status or military service, then it can be taken out of context or with the context that you are a uniform wearing member and that you are representing that service or the DOD as a whole in that situation. So the comments that you make, the things that you post or the way you spin something, all comes back to on all of us. And that's really where that AFI comes into play is to allow those individuals to know that even if you didn't attend it didn't matter what your status is in, but based on the fact that you have an affiliation with us, then you do represent us in these scenarios. Right? - [Erredge] Yeah. And I think, we've seen this play out really recently here with Chief Bass and somebody. (Mathison laughs) So I think that's what kind of generated us wanting to have this podcast and we put some guidance together for people and that's what we kind of just want to reinforce

here about what kind of behaviors do you think are appropriate. - [Mathison] Yeah, so chief Basses situation was very interesting so in regards to us being in the military internally, she did, I believe, and this is just me talking so don't think I'm speaking for the air force here, but just me and my personal opinion she did have reason to say what she said. Right? However, I believe again personal opinion, she kind of forgot the perspective of the public whenever she made her response. Right? And so what the public saw was someone in this high, like this high authority figure, basically coming after this poor innocent airmen. Right? And so, and it's debatable, was he really trolling? Was he being sincere? I mean, we honestly don't know when you look at the commentary and the thread and everything; it's all very subjective because there's such minimal information given. And so whenever you're read this, we all automatically tend to start making assumptions about what's going on, and that's the thing that can get us in trouble right? Are assumptions. - [Howard] Great, if you don't know what the true intent is. Right? So, - [Mathison] Yeah. - [Howard] and that's one of those hard things about this particular situation is it's truly hard to understand true intent. Right? And then I think that goes back to what you were saying Colonel Howard to the beginning of the conversation was, as we grow we tend to learn, look at the people I have the conversation read the non-verbals, when we take it into a digital realm, those things can get lost. I remember as a young airman when I first started learning how to use email right? So here's this great idea. Let's email things. Not knowing etiquette right? That's one of the purposes of social media conversation today is etiquette. Etiquette with email was new. Right? You didn't know. So I think I accidentally left caps lock on, Right? And I'm like (gibberish), send it off. And then... - [Erredge] Super excited, and you send your email - [Mathison] Whoa... - [Erredge] Whoa... (Laughing) - [Howard] And then all of a sudden get back, why are you yelling at me? (Erredge laughing) Whoa, I wasn't yelling at you. You know airman Howard, you really shouldn't be yelling at people. A you're an airman, and B, do you know who you sent that to? (Laughing) I didn't think of it. I just, I sent the message. I just, I looked at it as, script. It wasn't meant in anything. Right? So that's definitely something that I think as we grow that we have to put out there is what some good etiquette is and then how do we present ourselves? I mean, there's whole business is now about your reputation online. What, what has been said about you, how you present yourself, things that you put out there and it all comes into play because your digital presence now is part of your legacy. When you look at a job interview right? So if we know who these interviewees are, sometimes not always I've heard of this, especially on the civilian side that they will look up, look you up on Facebook. - [Erredge] I did when I was hiring for some of these positions here in the wing. - [Howard] Right. I just did a quick check. I just, just want to know if there's any grenades hiding in there and social media, then at least it's something to talk about. - [Howard] Right. - [Erredge] I think this chief Bass is a good case study for us to kind of break down and take a look at from your perspective as the PA submits. - [Mathison] Yeah so some do's and don'ts really when it comes to social media engagement is one, just stay cognizant and aware of what exactly it is you're typing and know that your tone, your body language, your feelings are not exactly necessarily being conveyed through your text. Right? I mean, it's just like writing a post-it note and leaving it on

someone's desk. Honestly, I am a huge proponent in, this is again, it's debatable how people want to do it but I'm personally, I'm a huge proponent of using emojis. And that's just because it really helps convey the emotion of what it is you're saying because sometimes when you strip things down to the basic message, depending on how your recipient is feeling, the recipient of your messages is feeling, it could come off as really rude and abrupt, to them anyway whereas you may not initially have intended that. So me personally, I use emojis all the time, even at work. I mean it's not necessarily professional and that can be debatable I understand that. But at the same time I want to make sure the people I'm talking to understand I don't mean this in a mean way. I'm just asking a question or sending a message. (Laughing) - [Erredge] I'm a late adopter of emojis I mean, I love it. Cause I get that sense sometimes I'm always, I feel like it's about, I'm just very businesslike and then using those emojis has really helped me think about okay, I just said this, that might be taken, a little too directly - [Mathison] Uh huh. - [Erredge] or I don't want to go the wrong way. So I'll put a smiley face or something after it saying, "Hey, it's all good. I'm just conveying some information." - [Mathison] Yeah, exactly. And then some other things to think about too, when you're out there in social media land, is you have to remember this as public even if you're on a private page or someone else's private page, things can be screenshotted. Things can be shared, it is public out there. Like make sure you check your privacy settings, obviously, you always want to make sure that your message is going exactly where you want it to go. But even then, because it's online, it's still public. (Laughing) And I can't emphasize this enough. - [Howard] Even when you think you're having a private conversation depending on what if it's not a direct message. Right? So if you're putting on a board, even though you you've got yours locked down to only friends, - [Mathison] Uh huh. - [Howard] Those that you've responded to don't necessarily have it all to their friends, which means there's routes that individuals can still find that conversation or be included in a conversation that you did not know that they were even eyes on, - [Mathison] Uh huh. - [Howard] which means in those situations, you did not necessarily know how many eyes are actually seeing that conversation. - [Mathison] Uh huh. - [Howard] And then you see it's private or not, especially when we talk about social media. Right? - [Mathison] Yeah. - [Howard] And that's how a lot of people get in trouble is they think that here's a conversation from A to B or B to C and no more than ABC and D is here, when reality is, we've got double Z, right? (Laughing) That's all been filtered through and it's all been pushed to. And, and you may have made an inside joke amongst your small group of friends, that it turns into something out of context or probably wasn't appropriate to begin with, then now is out there and it's out there forever. - [Erredge] There's no expectation of privacy, right? - [Howard] Correct. - [Erredge] You gotta go into it thinking that everything I put out there is fair game for all. And most of this stuff is all going to be discoverable in court. So, I mean, I heard example of, somebody that is having over the years was I haven't had a good relationship with a spouse, went back and forth the social media stuff and then the relationship went sour with the spouse, they went back and dug this stuff up completely out of context now. Right? And using it for whatever they want to use in the divorce proceedings. And so we're not trying to scare people off or tell you not to do it... - [Mathison] Yeah right. - [Erredge] It's as important to

think about the consequences here when you're doing this. - [Howard] From a tier perspective right? So there's case laws out there that show that those social media posts can also be used against you for termination for some companies, because you represent that company and now when you make a comment or say something or are part of a group then now you're representing them and it can be taken negatively and be grounds for termination. - [Mathison] Uh huh. - [Howard] It's more of, again, a we're not trying to tell people no, we just want to make sure that our airmen know what is in front of them and when they use this particular platform. - [Mathison] Uh huh, exactly. And that's one of the reasons why, it is scary out there. And I completely understand that it, day in day out, this is where I live though. And I would love to tell everyone, don't be scared. All you have to do is just be genuine and sincere. So once you realize that someone has taken something the wrong way from you or you realize that someone's baiting you, for instance maybe you just post, okay, I'm a Democrat. Maybe that's all you said, like I'm a Democrat and this is the political party I support. And that's one of those controversial things kind of that can get people really riled up, right? Because people are out up about politics right now. So, but you are allowed to state your opinion, period. You are allowed to state your opinion when it comes to politics. Right? But this might engage some people to comment on your posts. And so they tell you okay, "You're an awful person for being a Democrat." Which of course will kind of make you mad. Right? And so you get on there (chuckles) and respond and you're like, "How am I an awful person? Blah, blah, blah." - [Howard] And they troll you, yeah? And the next thing you know ... - [Mathison] And then they start trolling you, you start getting a little mad because you're thinking, and also you're you feel, you know that this is public as well so, they are in public attacking you. Right? And so... words are hard (laughing) so you feel defensive. - [Erredge] We understand you, defend yourself. - [Mathison] Yeah, you want to defend yourself and then next thing you know you're in this misunderstanding what this person, and you're like, I don't even know how I got here. You said some things that you didn't really want to say but you did it in the heat of the moment. And then now what do you do? And so my recommendations is one, stay away from sarcasm. Sarcasm does not carry through texts. So you can say one thing, but actually mean it in tone and body language as another thing. And then even if it is picked up on, it may not even be appreciated. - [Howard] I wonder, brings me to a great example that is there's a car insurance commercial out there that, kind of breaks that down. Right? So, is this really happening right? Yes, it's happening sweetheart. (Mathison laughs) Right. So the first picture is the dad giving the daughter the car and the second picture is "Is this really happening?" And "Yes, it is happening sweetheart." It's a guy and his cars up on blocks (laughing) and it's a cookout they're going, "Yeah, it's happening sweetheart." Right? (Mathison laughing) And the same thing happens on social media is like, you may mean it this way, but it is received that way or it's not exactly what it, what it seems. Right? - [Mathison] Yeah. And so that's always my recommendation. I mean, especially if you don't know the person that you're speaking with, you just don't want to be sarcastic with them. And then once you realize that they're baiting you, disengage, just stop talking to them, let the conversation continue without you. You don't need to be part of that. - [Erredge] Really hard to do. Right. 'Cause some people get so emotionally

attached to the topic and defending themselves or their family or somebody else. And so my brother went through this recently, not recently, a couple of years ago, it was an argument about football, why he doesn't support the local home team? And the guy that was a friend of mine growing up was baiting him to have this discussion. And I told them just stop, right? And then it stops right? - [Mathison] Uh huh. If you stop, then the discussion stops. - [Mathison] Yeah, you gotta break the cycle - [Erredge] Gotta break the cycle. (Mathison laughs) Sometimes pride right. Pride a good thing and a bad thing. Right? - [Howard] It's good to have pride in what you do, pride in yourself and everything. But when you get too proud and won't let those things go and understand that it's not worth that effort, it can kind of get you in trouble real quick. Right? I mean, there's a no, I'm sure we all have different examples of where that kind of just kept on going. I've known people, right? I, friends of mine who will purposely bait somebody to give them the conversation because they find it humorous. Right. But now then it gets pulled into something else because they know that they're going to pull on that pride string and get someone to just really defend this with all kinds of passion and lead it to a whole different situation. - [Erredge] I mean, if it's that good pick up the phone and call somebody or do it in person if you think you got that kind of relationship with somebody and that way you can kind of feel it out and see what's best. What do you think about, I know you talked a little bit earlier about photos, but like, we want people around the wing to submit photos and posts to the pages about what the unit's doing - [Mathison] Uh huh. - [Erredge] Got any guidelines kind of around unit activities and what should be? - [Mathison] Any good photo opportunity honestly is what I'm looking for sir. I mean, the only, what's the word I'm looking for... requirements for lack of a better way of putting it, or guidelines that I would put out there is it is still COVID-19 land out there. Right? And so basically what that means is face masks and social distancing are still really important. Anything I put out there on social media, on behalf of the 960th it really does have to meet those requirements. So you submit something in you're breaking that requirement, unfortunately, it's a nice photo. I just can't do anything with it. - [Erredge] Or breaking any kind of guidelines or rules or values that we believe are important. - [Mathison] Oh yes, yes. Definitely. - [Erredge] We're going to use that as an opportunity to provide some feedback to you as well. - [Mathison] Uh huh. Yeah so if you're out of uniform that, it'll definitely be a no-go, if you're breaking safety rules, like you're supposed to be wearing safety glasses, can't post that, and anything like that. Of course I can't, I just can't do anything. - [Howard] Or perceived inappropriately. - [Mathison] Yes. Anything that's perceived in appropriately and sometimes I'm not perfect. I will miss some things because I'm just a human being and we all make mistakes like that. There were just some references I'm not going to get because even though I live in social media land doesn't mean that I am cognizant or aware of everything that's going on out there on the Internet. - [Erredge] Yeah, I remember one time you brought a photo to me when you first came on board, - [Mathison] Uh huh. - [Erredge] Brought a photo to me and wanted to make sure and kind of understand what it meant and we had discussion about it. - [Mathison] Uh huh. - [Erredge] I think, you should have that with your supervision chain as well. Like just if there's anything telling you maybe I should ask somebody about it. -

[Mathison] Uh huh. - [Erredge] Trust your gut, you should probably ask first and have that discussion or write about you? - [Mathison] Uh huh. Exactly. Yeah. So I do try my best and I would just say this to use your best judgment. If you have that niggling doubt in the back of your mind, have someone come double check it for you. It's not going to hurt anything and this is just in general for any kind of social media posts. This isn't just, submitting stuff to me, and then me posting stuff on for the 960th. This is just in general. It's always a good idea to have someone double check something. If you have that little bit of doubt. So... - [Howard] I know, I always have someone edit my correspondence. I know that it's going to be somewhere along the lines of maybe controversial or potentially perceived differently. I'll have someone overlook what I wrote before you even send them via email. So I mean, in social media, just email alone. - [Mathison] Yeah. - [Howard] I take those efforts. That's for sure. - [Mathison] Uh huh. - [Erredge] Yeah. I think there's definitely more scrutiny nowadays than, before, when we grew up chief and I was airman Howard Lieutenant Erredge, I wait a little more leeway with the communication styles and we're forced to have the discussion. So I kind of think about that now, if I'm not going to say something to your face and I'm probably not going to want to post it right? I've tried to call you and have that discussion versus just to have it. - [Howard] Just go back to the old school conversations. Right. So if I wouldn't say it to your face, why would I say it behind your back and the same thing with social media? Right? If I wouldn't say it to you or it's nothing that I've told you before, then I'm not going to be, this is not the place or the time that it's going to happen. - [Mathison] Uh huh. - [Erredge] Yeah. This is a vast subject. We could talk about this for hours and hours and days. - [Mathison] Oh yeah (laughs), days, and there's so much more like, I want to say about, obviously we're limited on time a little bit but I would like to say one more thing and that's, if you find yourself in trouble, it does not hurt to bring it up to your supervisor, just to let them know that "Hey, I got myself in a little bit of hot water here, FYI this happened," so, and then, like I said, disengage, the moment you feel like you're in a little bit of hot water, don't let pride take the wheel. You are the one in charge of what you're doing. And Oh, one more thing that I did want to say, so let's see, where is it? Okay. 100%. This is against the AFI. Do not do this. Anything defamatory, levelus, vulgar, obscene abusive, profane, threatening, hateful, racially ethnically, or otherwise offensive or illegal information or material is specifically prohibited. Do not ever post anything like this online, whether it's a direct or private message or whether it's on any kind of social media platform. It is strictly prohibited. You post anything like that, and we find out about it, guess what? You're going to get in trouble, period. (Laughing) - [Erredge] just like in the office, like all those things apply that we shouldn't be doing that in any other realm. - [Mathison] Uh huh, yes. - [Erredge] So think about that right? If it's not okay to do it in real world, - [Mathison] Uh huh. It's not okay to do it there. And if you are thinking about trying to do one of those things, we need to have deeper discussions chief. (Howard laughs) Chief need to have a one-on-one with somebody - [Mathison] Yes. - [Erredge] And see if this is the right... - [Howard] This is the real grandma test. Right? (Mathison laughs) Would you do this in front of your grandmother? - [Erredge] Yeah. - [Howard] There might be some exceptions, but I know there's a lot of things... - [Erredge] Can you stand in front of CNN with a camera in your face and

defend it. - [Howard] So that was the five o'clock news test that one of my colonels gave me. And he's like... - [Erredge] Yeah. - [Howard] You gotta make sure it passes the CNN test. - [Mathison] Uh huh. - [Erredge] Yup. - [Mathison] Exactly. - [Howard] Sure. - [Erredge] Well, thanks Sam for joining us today, coming out from behind the microphone, - [Mathison] Yeah. - [Erredge] To front of it, I really appreciate that. And we talked about social media through the other podcast too, - [Howard] Right. - [Erredge] But not, we want to spend some time specifically addressing some of the pitfalls here and I appreciate you spending time with us and we'll hear from you again. - [Howard] Thank you Sam. - [Mathison] Right, no problem anytime (upbeat music)