Ep. 25: The commander's inspection program

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Gladiators, welcome back to the Sword and Shield Podcast. I'm Colonel Rick Erredge, the 960th Cyberspace Wing Commander. Today, I'm joined by... - Master Sergeant Reggan Greene, the Inspector General Superintendent. - Welcome, thanks for joining us. - Thank you, Sir, glad to be here. - Yeah, I'm really excited. We're going to have a conversation today about all things IG. - Yup, looking forward to it. - And so, we got a Sergeant Greene here is fairly new to the wing. You've been with us for almost of the year. - Yes, sir. - Excellent, yeah. So, she comes with a ton of experience in the IG world and we're really, really glad to have her. And she's been a huge help for us as we're on this journey of maturing the wing. So, let's kick it off here with a little discussion about what the 960th Cyberspace Wing IG shop is responsible for. And then, we'll just let it go from there. - Absolutely, so essentially the IG, we play a vital role in ensuring the readiness, discipline, efficiency of the Air Force mission. However, our goal is to actually have the individuals understand, the people as well as the leadership, that they are the greatest asset to what we do. So, we're responsible for a bunch of different programs, the majority of readiness, all readiness exercises, the Commander's Inspection Program complaints resolution, fraud, waste, and abuse, anything along those lines. So, we're responsible for that here. - So, you have a small shop. How many folks are on the IG team for us? - Yeah, so we have myself, Major Tim, who is the Director of Inspections, we have Ms. Karelis Ford, who is the Exercise Planning Coordinator. And then, we have a new incoming troop on December, Tech Sergeant Chandler Walker, and he is coming with a vast amount of experience with readiness and exercises. So, we're looking forward to having him on board. - Yeah, I'm excited to have the full team on board and unlock all the potential that your team can bring to us. - Yeah. - I think it's I spent, it's been 26 years now, and when I started my career, I remember as a Lieutenant, hey, there's an inspection coming, the IG's coming, back your truck up, put all the stuff we don't want the IG team to see in your truck, you take it home. And then when the inspection is over, you bring it back to the office. We've evolved pretty significantly since then. What have you seen in your transition in time about where we were then and kinda where we are now, and the positives around that? - Sure, so as you were saying, it's typically been a black hat, a white hat type of environment for the IG, or that's what it was perceived to be. So, really what we're doing is focusing on the education and training piece, and having the leadership, the commanders, as well as all individuals understand that we're not here to be black hat, white hat so much, but we are here to provide that education and training, and also help evolve the wing into understanding how they fit into that bigger picture,

and really having the leadership as well as again, the airmen understand how to embrace the red and what that means by accepting and documenting risks, because we want to see that as the IG that they are aware of undetected non-compliance and that the commanders are aware of and documenting that risk. - As I think you made a good point there, right? You said commanders and airman, kinda the team. So, the new framework for these kinds of inspections and documenting and known risk and unknown risk is really what we call the CCIP, right? The Commander's Inspection Program. - Yes, Sir. - That's a little bit different before, because before I felt like the IG team was kind of like responsible for making it happen, we've shifted the focus where it needs to be on the commander to give them the tools and the opportunities to do all those things we talked about. And then, you're there really to, IG team's here to help, right? - Yes, Sir, so we really provide the administrative overview of the Commander's Inspection Program. So, ultimately it is the wing commander's program, and he has the ability to enable and encourage his squadron commanders to be able to accept that program and really start their own programs at their own level, and take that holistic approach. And then again, we're just here as the IG to do the oversight and provide that education, the tools and the training necessary so that they can be successful in their positions and in their command, 'cause obviously they're dealing with all sorts of things on the daily basis and scenarios, and you never know. - Right, I think it's an opportunity to put kind of the framework around the commander's problems to detect the compliance, non-compliance, and help them focus really where they need to focus on. And so, we've got the four major graded areas, and we kinda box those at times to help people focus and certain things go in certain areas. And then, we address those very deliberately through a number of methods and venues. - Yup, absolutely, and that is the larger picture is relating those four MGAs or major graded areas, how that overall syncs up with the wing commander's priorities in his overall Strat Plan, and having the commanders at their level, especially at the squadron level, understand how that relates to risk in data driven decisions and relating that to the big overall picture for the wing. - And I think for a long time, I won't say a long time, but the last several years we've talked a lot about, we need to make data-driven decisions, right? It's really important to do that, but we've never really helped our commanders do that. How do we give them the tools to do that? Even myself spending time in command, I use that, I kinda try to figure it out on my own, but then when I became squadron commander, and then we started the CCIP, it really kinda helped put in focus for me. And I think we've moved significantly since the time you've came on the team, and we hired Major Tim, and we're at this point now where I feel really comfortable that we're getting to the end game of really given the commanders tools to make decisions based on data. - Absolutely, and I would agree with that. Starting off, there was a misconception that the self assessment program for the commander was specifically concerning the Management Internal Control Tool, so MICT, and essentially that is a way for the functionals to talk to the units and relay that message as a two-way communication back and forth, but it really doesn't grasp the concept of all risk and how they're making data driven decisions. So, there's a number of things that go into the self-assessment program with just that small MICT portion being one of them. So, it's really how they are correlating and understanding where the risk is all over the

entire squadron, and being able to make decisions based on understanding where their risks are, so that they're prepared to further execute their mission that way. - And I think it's important too to talk about, we need to make sure that units and supervisors are, when we talk about taking risks, right? They should take risks that they're responsible for and not take risks for somebody else. So, a supervisor in the unit should not be taking risks that's really a decision the commander makes. And then the squad commander shouldn't be making decisions that's a group commander decision. Then all through the organization. And this kinda this implemented the right way can help put that in the frame of mind that folks know where their area responsibility is, and then how they can apply that data and understand what their decision is. - Yup, absolutely, and I think it's imperative to understand that as a collective service in the military, we absolutely don't have all the money and resources we need to be able to do our jobs and do them effectively. So, really it comes down to the commanders, understanding what they can and can't do with the resources that they have. And that's what it comes down to is being able to document that risk and understand that sometimes, the programs or the processes or the people aren't able to make things grain. And they're not able to do that at the unit level. So, really when I talk about embracing the red, that's what it means by documenting the resources constraint and saying, here's what I can't do, and here's what I need help with. And so, that's the point that we're trying to get across is it's so much more than just one piece of the pie, for instance, MICT. - Yeah, I find it very helpful. It kinda forces the discussion about risk, and you can talk about ways to mitigate it. And then if you can't, then it's pretty clear about where the decision lies, and then you just present that and say, "Here's what we can do, here's why, "this is the risk I'm unwilling to take." And then that fits into somebody else's box. And we're trying to do that with building the risk-based sampling strategy and give units the tools to tailor kind of what they need to look at, but yet have really a deliberate kind of process for them to assess. Where have you seen the, no, from my perspective, I feel comfortable with RBSS. I think we probably aren't to the point where we need to be, all the units, some units find it easier, and some are struggling a little bit. So, any thoughts there about how we can help or help them move from where they are now to where they need to be? - Yeah, so that's a great point. One of the things that I like to focus on again is taking a look at what is their entire unit consists of with the programs and the processes? What does their unit doc and their METS statements say, or their Mission Essential Task Statement say? How are they effectively meeting that mission? Where are all of their additional duties? And taking that into a collective purview and understanding really where their programs and resources lie. And so, that's really the start of RBSS is to understand what that means for each of the squadrons. So, there has been some confusion in the past where the RBSS is again, only focused on that MICT portion, but again, taking into that approach of all areas, especially when it concerns the mission and meeting mission requirements of what they can and can't document, and really putting those programs that are so crucial to the mission first and foremost, and then working into their schedule all of the rest of the things that they have going for the rest of the year. So, it's really a marathon and definitely not a sprint. And so, it does take time to understand what RBSS or risk-based sampling means, but we're definitely headed

in the right direction from where we go. And the more we can stay consistent with our message as the IG office, the better off we will be in helping them understand and where to find tools in those educational, trying to meet with the commanders in as well as the people to provide those avenues of education and training for them. - Yeah, you and your team have been really helpful to me, and I'll be honest, I was overwhelmed. I know we had the CCIP and I kinda understood it, but it was like, where do you start, right? And kinda what's important. And so, I kinda went back to the foundation of, I was comfortable with MICT, we start there, but then when you helped me understand that, hey, each one of these areas is a data point, and then we use the RBSS as maybe the collection point for all your data, and then think about that way, prioritize it, and then it became much clearer for me. And then, the light bulb went off, just clicked for me. - Yeah, it's funny you say that because I, in my IG career, I refer to it as the IG light bulb with the commanders. And so, it takes some time and it's a stage process. So, right when you start the process, there's a lot of pushback with do we have to do this? Is this something that's necessary? How important is this to the mission? And then, constantly training it and having 'em get to that point of, okay, now it makes sense, and then I can refer to that, their IG light bulb went off because it clicks, and then they just get it. And they have a running program and a process and a way to document the risk and resource constraints. - Yeah, we did not have that discussion ahead of time. That just came up naturally here. And yeah, I'm lucky to have you and the team here that I can lean on right away to help me for requestion. And I know not all the units necessarily have that level of expertise. And so, how has your interaction been with the units, and how can you and the team help them continue to get closer to flipping that switch on and getting the light bulb on for them? - Sure, and so that's also a great question, because prior to COVID, I was asking myself what can I do to make this better for, especially one of our biggest challenges, which is the GSUs and having the unit separated? And so, it's hard because you have that in-person relationship with the units here at the 960th Cyber Wing and JBSA, but it's when you have the 860th and the separated units, I don't get that face time. So oddly enough, while COVID has been a less than ideal situation, it's definitely has allowed room for growth because it has been challenging. And I say that because we've had to find innovative ways to come up with inspections, and coordination and facilitation, and I've actually appreciated some aspects, especially the teams and being able to hit the camera and have that live face version with the GSUs. And so, that is one of the things that we have taken to a new level, being able to coordinate and being able to not be there in person per se, but having that face time, whether that's through Teams or through Skype or whatnot. So, I've actually appreciated it in that aspect. And I think it's vastly important to be able to have that face-to-face interaction so that they can see you and that they can put a name to the voice that they hear briefing them every single week during the staff meetings. And so, I look forward to implementing that technology and the innovativeness of this year and coming forward, going into our calendar year '21, and working with the units, and hopefully, because of those collaboration tools that we found during COVID, we've been able to really create a hub site and share collaborative efforts from the IG office with the 860th as well as the 960th groups. So, we've got a lot of great things planned, a lot of great groups

planned through Teams and different meetings. So, I look forward to continuing to work with the GSUs, as well as the JBSA units. - Yeah, that's a great point. Sometimes we have a tendency to focus on all the negative things and the bad aspects of what's going on, but again, military people, great minds, and we find ways to innovate, right? Be flexible and find ways to get it done. And frankly, I was stressing about, okay, we've got this UEI coming up, how am I gonna get the IG team here out to everywhere and give the units the time that they need and do we have money for it? And the travel and the wear and tear on you and the team, bodies going everywhere. It was just overwhelming. And so COVID hit and it's like, okay, now you've been able to deliberately address time with each unit, get that face time that's so important for them, and you, and I'm really excited. And I'm kinda like ready for this UEI. I'm excited to show people who we are and what we're doing, and how far we've come, and show 'em all the great work we've done. And I don't view it as like I did 20 years ago, trying to avoid and figure out how to hide stuff from the team, I'm proud of what we're doing here, and let's show 'em and identify the things that we know we're not doing and we need help with, and I think that's okay. And so, what are you thinking about as we prep for UEI and kinda what worries you and where we need to close any gaps? - Sure, so great question. One of the things that we're focusing on now is with the CSAF's new intent, General Brown, he had highlighted accelerating change or losing. And right now, we're really taking that initiative and intent into action with our IG office specifically. And so, we're stopped, we are not going to continue doing things that don't make sense. And so, utilizing our resources where we can and taking advantage of the opportunities, not only that these collaborative and innovative technologies have provided for us, but looking at how we can address cyber readiness. And because obviously we are in an atypical wing, not being the same as a regular air force, and so right now, our big focus going into the June UEI is to really key in on how we can exercise our cyber mission and our readiness through our mission essential tasks. And really the focus of that is going to be through real-world exercises and how we can collect credit for that. And I think that has been one of our biggest hurdles and will continue to be because how do we exercise cyber? That's been kind of the long-standing question between the ACC as well as the larger Air Force. And we're really keying in on what we can do and what makes sense, because if the lowest airman in the room is asking the question, "Does this make sense?" then it probably doesn't make sense to do that. And so, really focusing on what we can do and heightening those abilities to take advantage of our cyber mission and what we can do defensively. - Yeah, for sure. So I know the 688th just went through their UEI. I know we're going to kinda learn. And once we get the report, and they've been really good partners of ours and helped us kinda understand this, it was calming for me to understand and hear that they have some of the same challenges that we do and they're markedly different structurally and organizationally, they are, but they're having the same struggles. And so, I like the maturity where we talked about, we eventually, we looked a setting what the strategy should be and our priorities as a wing, focused on the MICT, and then we've moved to focusing on undetected compliance, and way we looked at A5s and documenting that, and then our data-driven decision-making process. And now, we're evolving to all right, really it's about readiness and how we're doing that. And

I think that we need to define readiness differently for cyber. And I know you guys are going to help us do that and move along. What kind of things do we need the units to focus on, and maybe specifically for the UEI, and how can they use what they're doing, real-world mission day to day, to help document how they do their job every day? - Sure, so we've actually had the conversation here within the wing within the last couple of weeks on myself with the OSF flight, as well as the new UDM that just came on board on exactly what we're talking about right now. So, what the units are gonna be focusing on is how are they exercising their mission essential tasks in their units and taking credit for those, and then relaying that back up to the IG so that we can document and give them credit. 'Cause they're doing it, whether they realize it or not, from an IG perspective on the daily, weekly, monthly UTA, whatever it may be, on that basis. And so, focusing on the mission assurance aspect of it, the combat communication side of it, C2 supporting the 16th Air Force and 10th Air Force as well. And so, really keying in on what the units are doing in their unit specific mission essential tasks to document their readiness and how ready they are for the mission. And so, we are going to be taking advantage of exercising our cyber METS and taking that credit, and really focusing on that. And I highly encourage all of the units to document that as well. There'll be more coming out within the next few months of how we are identifying our mission essential tasks throughout the wing and how we are gonna be exercising that, as well as a brand new con ops plan, which I am super excited about for the IG office. So, it's going to be really exciting, we've got a lot going. - Yeah, I'm excited too. And we're still in this crawl, walk, run. And I don't know exactly where we are, but I feel like maybe we're not crawling anymore, but we are still going kinda through everything for the first time as an organization. And I think it's okay to not eat the entire elephant in one bite, right? We've been kinda chipping away at here, and maybe you've kind of laid out this is what the plan is, but I feel like it's been more of a natural evolution, and in between phases, we've moved faster and slower than others based on where we are, and I think that's okay. And I think we don't have it right yet. We don't have our METS right. And we know that, so we just gotta continue chipping away at it, work better and make sure that we're taking care of our airmen, we're giving people opportunities to improve, making the culture the right way so that they feel like they can improve and speak their mind. And we're taking care of people, and we're giving people opportunity. And that's kinda what I think about all the time. And the IG shop is really there to help us move the ball forward. - Yup, absolutely, and it's really come down to a trial and error period, because we're a brand new wing, 2018, we stood up as a wing. So, we're still trying to figure it out and what that looks like. So, doing the best with what we've been provided with the resources, but also coming up with innovative approaches from the IG office. 'Cause I don't want to be just the standard, the norm, we're cyber, we are awesome. And so, we need to be able to say, here's what we're doing that's different than the RegAF. And when the inspectors come in for the UEI, they can say, "Wow, this is something great. "This is something to be shared "across the entire Air Force." And so, that's really my goal to get us there. And it is in phases and it is a long approach to obviously what the end state goal is. So, it is gonna be trial and error, especially with the GSUs and a majority of working with leadership to get that

figured out, as well as our mission partners, collectively speaking. So, we've got a lot of things going, and really we're on the path to go outside of the box. And so, I am looking forward to the UEI, and I am excited to host the inspectors, to have them come in, to show exactly what we do, especially with Defensive Cyber Operations and our cyber system weapon systems. And it's going to be great. - Yeah, I'm excited to just kinda get a benchmark, right? Figure out where we are, think we're doing pretty good. I don't feel like I'm going to be surprised by anything. And so, that's why I'm like, "Hey, let's get it, "let's get it done, "and then we'll chart the path from there, "what the next phase will be for us "and how we move forward." So, I really appreciate your time today, and we hope everybody listening found some things helpful, and it kinda shows that I think the excitement about where we are and why we're growing this mission. So, thanks for joining us today. - I appreciate it, glad to be here, and look forward to where we're going. (Upbeat music)