Ep. 4: Cyberblock

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Welcome gladiators. This is Chief Master Sergeant Chris Howard and today I'm here with Master Sergeant Vielman. - Hello everyone, Master Sergeant Vielman here, I am with the 433rd Med Group, but in transition over to the 50th Network Warfare Squadron, where I will be the newly assigned first sergeant. Yay. - Awesome. Well welcome. - Thank you. - Also this morning we wanted to talk about some of the travel vouchers. I think that we'd like to start with what we call RTS. Which is a Reserve Travel System, or more commonly known as eFinance. And you've been heading up what we call the Cyberblock. Could you talk a little bit about Cyberblock and then we'll go into eFinance. - Yes sir. So the Cyberblock is modeled after the H&R Block, which is in theory supposed to work where a member has an appointment and I have all the information ahead of time pertaining to that member's travel voucher. So I have the order number, and I have the member's contact information so that I can contact the member on the day of their appointment and basically reach out to the member. At this time I have already researched the voucher and more or less know whether the voucher is in the system and why the voucher hasn't been paid out or if it's been rejected. Upon contacting the member, we basically work through the issues that are going on with that member's voucher. That the Cyberblock is supposed to be... To assist the members to expedite the process. - How does that member get that appointment? - We have a TMT that goes out every week. And in the TMT you have three different schedules. You have two for DTS travel vouchers, and those are being headed by members of each group. So you have one for the 860th and one for the 960th COG, respectively. And then my schedule specifically for eFinance travel vouchers, because they're a little bit more troublesome. - Okay. And you really do break these down right? You do their pre-research and everything before the actual appointment. What is the member need to have ready available for you? To help you with that. What kind of documents does an individual need to have? - So if the member has not submitted their travel voucher in eFinance, we are no kidding trying to work to submit the voucher. The member's gonna need their 938, which is their orders that are gonna take them to that TDY. They're going to need any receipts pertaining to that TDY, and that includes airline receipts, that includes lodging, if they parked at the terminal, they need to have that receipt as well. When it comes to mileage, that's something that we can figure out separately. And I usually show the member where to go, which is a taxi fare finder. But lets see, besides all the receipts, if they had any mods done to the orders, they definitely need to have the mods. And if there was a 1610 that was attached to the 938, which sometimes that happens because the RTS

system is specifically tailored because our reserve is we have a lot of multiple orders and changes in status. And so, if a member had a 1610 inside the 938, I need to have that as well. - Well we've talked about the 938 a little bit where that's the actual order, that's the activation order. Correct? - Correct. - And then the 1610 is the travel order? - The 1610 is... Though if a member is on a 938 is basically, let's say the member's on a 938 for let's say six months, then within those six months they go to a conference, that's gonna put them on a 1610 within the 938 which is another, basically it's another order. The 1610 is just a different order. - Right. 938s basically employs them full time and puts them in the status? - Correct. - And then the 1610 is used to move that member away from where one location to another location and back? - That's correct. - Okay. So, you were talking about when a member shows up to this virtual appointment, 'cause more often than not it's telephonic based on the fact that we have so many GSUs. The member has worked through their squadron. The squadron leadership has worked through their group's leadership at the COG and through a TMT tasker, they've got an appointment with you to look at that RTS voucher. They should more often than not... Right now we're talking about individuals that have problems with outstanding RTS vouchers. (Murmurs) So what are some of the problems that you're seeing? When it comes to these RTS vouchers? You'll help us kind of understand maybe some of the things that, some of the pitfalls that we're looking at, maybe some of the common mistakes that we're looking at? So that an individual wouldn't find themselves needing that appointment and maybe even getting paid a little bit faster. - Okay yes. And so since I've been here one of the objectives was to improve the current process, right to travel voucher initiative, to improve the process. And so, one of the big issues that we have is that members make mistakes on their vouchers, and it could be something small. One of the choices you have on the very first form, which is a 1351-2, which is what opens up as soon as you go into eFinance. You have a choice to select 12 hours or 24 hours of duration of travel. There are multiple, multiple vouchers that get kicked back for that simple, simple fact that somebody clicked on the 12 hours instead of 24. I think a lot of it is lack of education on the members. And so what we're trying to do, we're trying to put our videos together to address some of those education pitfalls. Another issue is that the voucher goes, after it leaves the unit, it goes to the 502nd, and then if there are any issues, the 502nd pushes their voucher to Ellsworth. If their voucher gets rejected by Ellsworth, when the member goes into eFinance, they don't see that it was rejected, all they see was complete. The only way that the member is knowledgeable that the voucher's been rejected is because the 433rd will contact the member. The 433rd does that by getting a reject listing from Ellsworth. So the fact that it goes from one entity to another to another, it definitely makes the process a lot lengthier and it leaves a member out of the communication loop because there is not a link between the member and the system telling the member where their voucher is moving. It requires an interjection from the 433rd. - Okay. So, when I as the member submitted, I see that it's... It gives me an indicator that it's accepted, correct? And it'll sit in that accepted mode. That means it's left my unit, it's left in my box, my unit, and it's sitting at the 433rd. And the 433rd takes it to the 502nd and 502nd sends it to Ellsworth. Correct? - No, so when you finish- - Okay. - The voucher, it goes straight from that unit, to the 502nd. And then from the 502nd

to Ellsworth. 433rd gets involved once it gets rejected because they get- - And only if it gets rejected? - Only if it gets rejected. And they get a reject listing which they theoretically are supposed to review weekly, but sometimes that doesn't happen. And so the voucher is just sitting out there rejected, and the member has no idea that it was rejected or what he or she needs to do to fix it. - What can the member do to get that notice then? Is there anything that the member can do? - The member can contact the 433rd. And I'm definitely going to post the contact information on SharePoint, because you have three individuals that take care of travel vouchers at the 433rd. So they are able to pull up the member's information and tell the member where voucher is sitting at. And I think a lot of times the member feels that there is no. They don't have that reach back. And so they just wait to hear back from either the 433rd or the unit. And sometimes that voucher can sit out there for months before the member realizes that it was rejected. - Okay. And a lot of times that goes back to those common mistakes rate. So we haven't clicked the correct box, or we haven't put in some prepped receipts or something, correct? Any other common mistakes that we're seeing by chance? - Members don't submit their orders. That's a big one actually. Which you would think probably the first thing they upload in their voucher. There's a list in SharePoint that tells you everything that you need to submit with your travel voucher. And so what I recommend is that people or the members get familiar with their SharePoint so that they can refer back to that. And before you submit your voucher, just check that you have everything that's on that checklist. You orders, your mods, everything that you know is going to pertain to that order. And again, you know when the voucher goes from the member to the AO, the AO are supposed to review 'cause they're reviewing for any mistakes and then they are authorizing that, they're approving it. So it has two stops before it actually leaves the unit. So- - Okay, sounds like, especially when we're talking about deployments that maybe an individual is prepared to actually travel maybe a folder with their orders and putting the receipts in the itinerary and all that together so that when it comes time for submission of that particular voucher, everything's sitting right there, and then it's a kind of a scan and send situation as they fill out the documentation. Would you recommend that as a potential course of action for an individual? As preparatory rate? For a voucher? - Absolutely. Mean nowadays you can have a scanner on your mobile phone, you can scan your documents and put them in your files. I've done that with my receipts when I'm traveling. So in case I lose receipts... If you lose a receipt, we have to do a loss receipt form, which is an additional document writing. So, we're trying to... If we're trying to do this a little bit smarter, I think if you know if you scan your receipts as you're traveling, you don't have to worry about losing them and you don't have to do that loss receipt form. So, definitely having everything in one place and scanning everything, build your little folder on your desktop and have everything so that way, you know that you have everything that's gonna pertain to that travel voucher. - Awesome. That's great. What other things are you seeing with these vouchers that are causing our members problems? - The process, you know. So, just to give you an example, when a member's voucher gets rejected and we review the reason why it was rejected, we identify it, "Okay." And we address it. Now we have to submit what is called a supplemental and what that is basically you asking the government to reimburse

you for something that was not originally pay on the original voucher. It requires a lot of documents. So when we upload the documents into SharePoint to the 433rd, the 433rd has to print that, basically take it to the 502nd and scan it. The 502nd grabs the vouchers, they scan it to Ellsworth, and then everything gets uploaded into the workflow, which is the system that communicates between all of us. 433rd, the FM office, Ellsworth and the 502nd. So it's a lengthy process. And so, you want to make sure that when you're submitting your supplementals, if you know that are... They specifically told you the reason for the reject, you want to make sure that you address the issue so that you get reimbursed correctly. Because if not, it's going to get rejected again, and then you going to have to do this process again and it's not an easy process, it's a lengthy process. It's a lot of forms, you have to upload into the 433rd, Airlift Wing, FM, SharePoint. And again, they grab the tickets as they... Whenever they have moments to go through those tickets, they grab them and they print everything. But you want to make sure that you address the issues correctly the first time. - All right it sounds like a very cumbersome problem here. And even a complex process for something that seems to be fairly straightforward. I think that it actually adds some annexed to the situation and I think preparatory work upfront helps with some of that. If we are constantly having to do supplements, to do this, not following those reject statements, this process could take months if not a year or more. So really getting that reject notice... Trying to get that reject notice and reading them into what is the problem, would help the member prevent further rejects. Is there any other things that a member could do to prevent a reject by chance? - So you just want to make sure your receipts are legible. A lot of vouchers get rejected for that as well. One of the things that I see a lot of rejects for, is the CED orders not being legible. And that's out of the member's control. Sometimes the CED orders that they receive are not legible. The one of the things I would recommend is that if you know you're getting deployed and you get that set of CED orders, as soon as you get those CED orders, scan a good copy and save it to a place where you know you can retrieve it from because when you're traveling with it, you keep tinkering with all your paperwork. By the time it's time for you to scan those CED orders they're going to be faded and they're gonna get rejected. And then you have to communicate with the 433rd so they can retrieve a new CED order. So it's a little cumbersome. I think if you can kinda think ahead and with the receipts just make sure that they look legible, CED orders and things like that. Sometimes that's one of the biggest reasons for reject. Is because they're not able to read the receipts. (Clears throat) - Good point. There is a couple of things I did wanna hit on that we've kind of hit real quick and that I'd like to define a little bit better. When we talk about some of the receipts, one of the key pieces that I hear about is a non-availability slip. What is a non-availability slip? - Non-availability is whenever the member is supposed to be residing on base, base lodging. But base lodging does not have any rooms available. They will provide the member a non-available letter, letting them know, since we don't have any availability, you need to go off base. And that's very important for the member to have because if the member does not get that Non-A letter and they go and get a room off base, it's gonna create issues when it comes down to paying their voucher because the government wants to... Whatever's more advantageous to the government, right? So if you go off base and you get lodging at a

place it's going to cost a lot more to the government, you may not get reimbursed for the full amount. But if you have that Non-A letter, then they will reimburse you for the money because there was non-availability on base. - Gotcha. And then when we talk about receipts, we're talking about receipts over a certain monetary right? Do you know what that monetary value is? - All right. So anything that's $75 or more, you need a receipt for. And again, if people lose receipts it happens. It's just natural. So if that happens, we need to do a loss receipt form. You're going to do a loss receipt form. You need to also submit your credit card statement showing the amount that you paid for that particular reimbursement that you are requesting the government reimburse you for. So, for example, I lost my airline ticket on one of my TDYs and calling the airline to get a receipt sometimes can be incredibly lengthy. And so I did a lost receipt form, and I had my credit card statement and I highlighted that area and I did my loss receipt form, and it paid out just fine. Though anything $75 or more definitely you need a receipt. But if you lose it, we can do a loss receipt form, as long as you have your credit card statement. - Right. So we talked about deployments as well, one of the things that I've heard might be a problem is conversion rates. How can we get some help with the conversion rates when we're dealing with receipts and actual reimbursement? - So according to the FM office, they do not want you to convert the actual expense. So if you are in Europe, and you're paying in that currency, you're going to scan the receipt and you're going to claim it in that currency. They have the actual conversions. So when you get paid out, they're going to reimburse you for the exact amount that you paid out when you were in that specific country. Now, what I recommend the members do is that they always review their Advice of Payment, which is the AOP. Because the member knows, okay when I was in Europe, I paid this much, and I know it was equivalent to this much, when you convert it to dollars. So you can make sure that they pay you correctly. And if they did not, then we would need to do a supplemental. - Awesome. I appreciate that. So I just want to walk through it one more time, just to help me understand. Okay. So I'm about to travel, I've been selected for a deployment, I need to make sure I have a good clean copy of my CED orders. And that's different than the 938, correct? - Correct. - So then I have my 938 that puts me into status if I'm a traditional reservist. And then I get a 1610 that takes me from my unit to my deployed location, correct? So I need all three of those pieces of documentation, correct? - But you'll not always going to have a 1610. A 1610 is if you go into a deployment, you definitely going to have a 938 which you definitely going to have your CED orders and your NATO orders. - Okay. - The 1610 only comes into place if you are already doing TDY somewhere and you have to do something else additional while you're on that TDY. - Okay. Awesome. So now I have my different types of orders that all are applicable at times. Then I have my itinerary and receipt from my flight, not the tickets, the actual itinerary with the receipts saying zero balance with the CTO fee on it. Then I travel, I get there. I have billeting available. So I just have my base lodging receipt. If I had to stay over at any location, and stay in a commercial hotel because base didn't have lodging then I need a non-availability slip, correct? Then I have all of the different receipts for the items that I had to purchase, or bills that I had to pay for my travel. Then I have my return ticket home. Then I have my return flight receipt itinerary. Then I go to do my travel voucher. So I

put all that together and I submit that. So any receipt over $75 with all of these receipts, boom, and as long as I clicked it that it's over 24 hours, I should be fairly set for an RTS voucher, correct? - Correct. Yeah. - Okay. - Depending if they don't find any errors. But yes. As long as, like you said, you submitted everything and you... As it happens, they do sometimes pay out like right away so- - Right and I know. I'm just trying to set the tone for- - Its rare, but yes. - For what we're hoping for, knowing that human nature comes into play, sometimes a fat finger here, fat finger there, a mixed box there, not having this document there. I'm just wanting to lay it out what this looks like if we do everything correctly and if we have everything prepped and trying to eliminate some of that annexed going into it. So if I have all these documents ready to go, when I go to sit down to do my voucher, and though I have this cumbersome system where I have to scan the items into it, then I have to make the connection from the scanned and workspace, connecting that to the actual line item in the actual voucher. Then everything should technically pay out correctly. - All right yes. - Okay. So, I know we kind of gotten really into the technical wits, I do want to tell you, thank you for all the hard work that you've been doing for Cyberblock. I know that we've cleared up thousands of dollars in supplemental vouchers. To clear out and get our airmen paid. So, awesome work there. I appreciate your time, kind of walking us through this. I know that talking to me can be kind of a hectic and hard, because I have to get a lot of definitions. So I appreciate it. Anything that you'd want to leave our airmen with when it comes to RTS vouchers? - So thank you, thank you for the comment. You know when I do these travel vouchers, I look at these sort of vouchers like they're my own. Because this is definitely very important, you're talking about the members' finances and how it affects their morale. So it's definitely a lengthy process and we're working through. What I would say is, for the members who hear this podcast and you have any suggestions on what you want to see in SharePoint as far as training, please send that to me, email me. I'm the only Vielman on the GAL. And my first name is Jeanett. Let me know so that we can... I'm trying to send out some education because I think if we educate ourselves better with these vouchers, then we can have a better result as far as payout. And that's definitely one of my goals and I will continue to work hard and continue to put out whatever I can out there. And if you have a voucher that you're going to submit in RTS, and you're not sure if it looks good, just let me know, call me or send me an email and I can look it over before you hit submit. So that way we can avoid that voucher getting rejected. - They can also use their ODTA in the unit, you can walk them through that? - They can use the ODTA. Right now we're going through training. We're doing some training. So the upcoming UTA, I'm going to have a training session, a live session, on how to complete a supplemental and how to upload it. So that's going to be very informative. So if can, you know, anybody that wants to log in, that's definitely a unit level you definitely wanna reach out to your ODTAs and we're working on getting them more training on eFinance specific. - Okay, awesome. So use your ODTA. Use the Cyberblock. And at the moment that's Sergeant Vielman. And have all the documents ready to go, and we have a recipe for success hopefully, huh? - That's right. - Awesome. - You might be paid on time. Whoop whoop. - That's the hope, right? (Vielman laughing) Everybody likes getting paid. And the other piece I'd like to leave our gladiators with is don't

suffer in silence. When these individuals are having problems that frustration can be very compounding and you're not the only one that's dealing with these travel voucher issues. We have tens of an, double-digit number of airmen that have voucher issues. So don't suffer in silence. Ask for some help. It's not you necessarily, maybe it's just a technology glitch or there is some knowledge there that we need to close the gap on so that we can get these turned around. But sitting on these vouchers longer only make it worse. We lose receipts, we lose timing and we also lose some footing on how to get these done fast. So, reach out to your ODTA, reach out to your Sports and Leadership, reach out to Sergeant Vielman and let's get these things taken care of so that you don't pay the bill or pay the consequences of any of the bills not being paid. So gladiators, I appreciate your time. That's going to close out our fourth episode of the "Sword And Shield". - Thank you for having me. - Thank you Sergeant Vielman. (Vielman laughs) I think that this is a valuable topic and I really do appreciate your time. - Yes sir. - Awesome. - Thank you. - Well I hope you have a great day. - Adios. (Upbeat music)