

## Ep. 9.1: Leadership Profile - Col. Richard Erredge

[Narrator] Welcome to Sword and Shield, the official podcast of the 960<sup>th</sup> 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)

Welcome to another episode of the "Sword and Shield." This is Chief Master Sergeant Howard, Superintendent of the 960<sup>th</sup> COG. And today with me - Colonel Rick Erredge, I guess this is our Wing Commander guy now. - Yes, sir. Congratulations on the selection to be our Wing Commander, it's exciting. And actually that leads us into the subject of today's podcast. We wanna welcome you aboard officially as the Wing Commander. So congrats and welcome aboard, sir. And the question that's out there is, how did you get here? So I was wondering if you could kind of give us an idea of, a little bit about your career and what brought you to the 960<sup>th</sup>. - Sure, well that's a little bit of a loaded question, I think, cause I'm not sure I know exactly how I got here and I don't know if I could replicate that path. What I do know is that a lot of people took care of me along the way. And I learned early on to put my nose down to the grindstone work hard. And I always told people to take care of me. And that was kind of maybe the old school method. I didn't really ask for a lot of help. I was told what I needed to do and what jobs to pursue and kind of what I need to get after my wife. And I took that advice and then try to make those decisions and try to have some personal goals and seeing how those kind of fit together and just kind of follow the path where it took me. And no, I didn't necessarily set out being a Second Lieutenant saying I wanna be a Wing Commander. - Okay, yeah, I was gonna ask you, was this one of your goals that you had early on in your career or was it just one of those moments that the opportunity arose and good vectoring led you to the doorstep of that decision? - So I've shared some of this with some folks here and there, but when I was a Captain, probably a Captain on two years as I'm Reg AF, I was at Charleston Air Force base, and I was starting to feel good about my abilities, six, seven years in, I kind of feel like I was figuring stuff out. And then I saw the, you know for us in support field at the time Mission Support Group Commander was kind of the pinnacle. And I was like, Hey, I wanna be a Mission Support Group Commander at some point. And then I saw the MSG at the Wing, be replaced by a flight suit wearing person, and that was medically couldn't fly anymore. And I thought, what are my real opportunities here? Are always gonna have a non-support person in the Mission Support Group? So I started kind of thinking about that, and then when I had the chance to transition to the Reserves, several years later, I found it was a different Reserve that almost every Mission Support Group Commander I saw, was somebody that grew up in that community or at least had crossed over and had some technical background in one of the competencies inside the Mission Support Group. - Right, good point, right? So you wanna have some of that skillset there for leadership, you know, I know that's

what we do on the enlisting side. So you talk about how you saw Reg AF and how some of those changes, and you've been in Comm for a number of years now, how would you say that the Comm-Cyber change has happened and some of your perspectives on that? - So I think it's a little bit forced, by leadership, it's not been super smooth or easy, and growing up in the personnel community, you'll see a lot of personnelists end up in really key jobs. And I think the value of Comm in the past, has not been seen as a real true Mission Support Group kind of competency. But I see that changing, as we've moved and started using the word Cyber and doing a better job in our community to talking about what we're bringing to the fight every day. I've seen that elevated. I think seeing the evolution of the 960<sup>th</sup> from an idea back in 2012/13, to move into a detachment, to a group and now to a wing, obviously has risen to the point where people understand the value that we bring. I mean, if you talk to Ricky Bobby and some of those folks at the beginning, it really took them a lot, a lot of hard work to get people to realize what an organization like this could be. And once that organization started to get some traction and there was talk about it, maybe it turning into a wing in the future. That's when I got excited about, Hey, I wanna continue this path. Maybe there's an opportunity in future for me to be a Wing Commander. And like Colonel Jones said, "change of command," right? This is probably our only chance to be a Wing commander as a true Cyber person in the Reserve, right? There's only one wing, timing's gotta work out right and you gotta be at the right time and right place. - We have made some paradigm shifts, right? We talk about Comm, at least some of us auto-hats around here, what they call the gray hairs on occasion, of where Comm was much more support, but it is, we look at our groups now they say operations. So we've made a huge shift from being a support entity to an operations entity. What's your view on that, sir? - Yeah, I think that's right. So in my mind we talk about, or at least I think about that moves from IT to Operations. And so I think there's a bit of a transition in there that will be called the IT-operations. And so trying to bucketize things, at least in my mind is IT is more infrastructure, and support to the mission where Operations is actually what you do. And we're conducting operations using that infrastructure and through an IP space to create effects, whether that's defensive or offensive, whether that's gray space, red space, blue space, or whatever that is. And I think that's helped with our other Operations folks understand that being on keyboard is just like anybody else creating effects either kinetically or non-kinetically, some of those other group fields. - So with Cyber being one of those key domains, it is interesting. And I was wondering if you could help me understand it from your perspective of how does the Cyber domain interact with the other domains that we discussed when we talking about land, talk about sea, we talk about air and even space. - Yeah, so it's interesting right? We've had this debate for years about what's a domain and is Cyber its own. But if you think about it and the way I think about it is we use Cyber and we being everybody, uses Cyber and every domain. So I don't necessarily want to debate whether it's his own domain or not, but every of our physical domains need Cyber and use Cyber. So you talked about space right? Space, it can't enable any operations without Cyber and that's how they're conducting their ops. So it's really interesting if you think about how integral we are to all the missions, especially when you start talking about fifth-gen airplanes becoming, a flying router

in air and then using that to conduct kinetic and non-kinetic information operations, which I think is probably gonna be kind of the next iteration of where we go, is using the data and information to make the enemy, behave differently. - Right, you know, you spurred some thought there, it almost seems like Cyber is almost a nervous system of all of our domains. It's a key piece that makes each piece work or helps enable that muscle or that muscle movement through that Cyber domain. - Yeah, I think that's a good analogy. So you think about maybe like the heart's pumping blood through your veins, throughout your whole body. Cyber and IT is really maybe that heart that's pumping the blood to all parts of the body to enable that muscle group or that function in your body to actually work. - And it's definitely an exciting time, 'cause we're really still in the infancy of this paradigm shift, from being Comm as a support to Cyber being operations. Being the new Wing Commander, what do you see our role as a wing going forward in that transition? - I think a lot about where I wanna be and where I want the wing to be when this is over, whenever this timeframe is over, and what I want that to look like. And I think it's important to posture the wing in a position to be successful in future. And what that looks like? I don't know. I know we have a demand signal for a number of different missions. We've gotta figure out what's really good mission for us and posture it in a position for us to take advantage of the way we participate as Reservists and compelling the relevant missions across the space and that we're relevant to our partners. And then when they need something, they think of us first and they call, "Hey, we want the Reserve unit that does this to do this." Like, we wanna be that first call, Ghostbusters, that they want us to come in and take care of whatever they need taken care of. - It's definitely, when we ask that question, "who are you gonna call?" It's going to be 960<sup>th</sup> Air Force Wing, right? - Yeah, that's what we want. We wanna call the gladiators. And we've gotta kind of fight through that. There's a number of, some of them are distractions. And I think we're gonna have to work hard within our own Command in AFRC to help our senior leaders understand where we fit in the big picture? What advantages and disadvantages there are to mission change and whether that we need to grow? And there's a lot of discussion, and General Borgen, he talks a lot about, he wants to grow and ISR, Space and Cyber are the growth areas he sees. Now that doesn't necessarily mean overall end-strength to us, but it just means growing and maturing into those missions that are needed, you know, five, 10, 15, 20 years from now. - And when we talk about growth maturity, and without actually saying the word yet, you put it out there, that flexibility. So as these missions change, Cyber changes, we're gonna have to have a lot of flexibility to adjust. So we'll see some expand in missions, right? And some reduction in other missions going forward. Is there any vision that you want us to kind of aim towards over the next few months as we start to develop out, what that's gonna look like, sir? - Yeah, so in my mind I talk about short term, midterm and kind of long term things. And I think short term is, we need to do some analysis in defining where the opportunities are, and where our challenges are. And frankly, work within the corporate structures of our organizations, meaning AFRC and Reg AF side, about where they want us, where they need us and document those. And I think short term wise, that's what we really need to focus on. Understand the landscape, and then mid to long term is we need to start the planning processes in

order to realize what that is, and then you use the word flexible. And that's not normally what we associate. So just Rick, you're just talking, not a representative of the government, but headquarters AFRC is not known for being super flexible and agile from a corporate process. And that's by design. And so that's designed so we don't chase these flash in the pan missions that the Reg AF wants us to fill very significant, critical, maybe short term gaps. So we don't chase that and the get stuck in a mission. So there's a reason for that, but we've gotta try to find some sort of a balance that allows us to move at the speed that our Reg AF partners need us. A mission that's gonna be lasting as well. - That's some good points. I kind of go back to my old Comm days, back in the 90s and early 2000s, we used to run by AFI 21, 116. That was our Bible of how we ran things. I'd say that we were prepping ourselves back then about some of these flexibilities within Comm when we started changing out some of the appendixes, right? So the chapter nine, well it specifically talked about COTS, Commercial off-the-shelf. So we had that first paradigm shift of understanding that the old Mil-Spec equipment, which was great, wasn't meeting the turnaround demand of technology of the day. So that changed, it going from having to have Mil-Spec to Commercial off-the-shelf. And I see that that pace is picking up. So when we get to Cyber, it almost seems that we have to be flexible to meet the demand of our customer set and to meet the adversary in the right space at the right time. What are your thoughts? - Yeah, so I think that's a great point, right? Our adversaries can iterate much faster than us, certainly the International Code and Law of Cyber. Some countries take it more seriously than others, right? And just the way you can conduct operations of anonymity is difficult for us. And we try to do everything above board and we try to do everything with we feel like is in accordance with International Law. Our adversaries don't have to do that. They don't worry about it. And this domain, if we're gonna agree that it's a domain, but I'm using Cyber to create, influence and shape behaviors, super easy to do from the adversary perspective, right? And we need to be able to be agile enough to counter that through innovation, through letting decisions be made by airmen at the lowest levels and in having good, solid TTPs to counter those effects in real time. And I know that's what the Reg AF specifically in the 688<sup>th</sup> Cyber wing, is they're really working hard in creating an organizational structure that allows that to happen real time, industry standard. And then I think that helps us if we go that route. You mentioned Mil-Spec and I remember those days, where we had the vans and the TDC equipment and everything kind of moves at a different pace. And now when we start to move more to industry standards, industry training, having that available to us is as lot easier, it allows us to get people trained and comes at a cost. I think that's gonna be one of our biggest challenges here is what can we afford to do and how do we pair that with a capability that we can afford as well? - And I think that puts a good challenge to the airmen within the 960 Cyber Wing or any airmen that's within the Cyber mission set, is how do you take the resources that we have on hand, whether that's actual equipment, whether that's fiscally constraints or whatever, and then do the most with it. Are there any challenges that you might wanna put out to your airmen to meet that demand, sir? - Yeah, so we use the word innovate all the time and I think you can innovate the way we think, right? Innovation always doesn't have to be a widget or a gadget that we wanna do. It's maybe the way we

think and the way we participate. And so we've seen some of that already. I know some of the folks at GVHU Cyber are doing some really great things from an innovation space that they're just allowed to think differently about a problem. And 16<sup>th</sup> Air Force is trying to change this mentality of that they wanna solve problems and create outcomes from those problems. So if we think about it from that aspect, what problems are you facing? We need to give them opportunities to solve those problems in a way where if it drives a resource bill, there's an easy way for them to bring that to leadership decision point. And then we make a resource decision based on that co-op but just the way we think we gotta do a better job of giving our airmen an opportunity to think differently about problems. - Now, good point sir. So I was wanting to take a couple of the pieces that you've already put out there, where we were talking about some of the flexibility for thought, right? The agile changes that we're gonna need in Cyber. And I think that you've helped prep some of that as the Vice Wing commander with our priorities and our priority champions. Was that the intent there with the priorities? - Yes, for sure. So, I wanted that to be organic and I wanted the airmen to really figure out what's important to them and then try to shape that into something that is applicable across the line. And I think giving responsibility to people as objective owners and goal owners is really an opportunity for them to help solve those problems much differently than what you and I could sit up here. Certainly you and I could sit up here and we could solve every problem that we think would be the right way to do it. - That tactical piece we may be missing right? So if one of our objective owners, goal owners, or even a priority champion out there, was looking for some advice to how to be successful. Do you have any advice on how they could tackle these problems and then be successful? - Sure, yeah. I think there are a number of things that you can do. And so some of the things I think about quite often are attitude and effort. I really think those are probably almost the only two things you can really truly control as a human being, control how you approach a problem and what kind of effort you put behind it. And so thinking about that from that perspective, how to solve a problem is really a tackle with hard work and have good attitude about it. And that will bring people together to help you solve the problem so you don't have to do it on your own. I think communication is critical to that. Communicating up, down, sideways and creating a space where people wanna communicate and bring ideas in. Obviously, it's really gonna be helpful to solving problems. And then, empowerment's important to me too. And that's what I tried to do with the priority champions is give some space, give them some broadened tent and then let them get after an area. And I feel really comfortable that we ended up with a really good solution. We may not have nailed everything, but I think we're addressing problems that we need to solve. And we've done that. And some other ways too, by disappointing people on orders like the travel voucher problem, right? We tried to be a little bit deliberate for that at first, and create the Cyber lock and try to force people into it. And it wasn't organic enough, it didn't really help. And then we put certain deal on orders and, you know, we kind of backed off and said, "here's the problem statement, go solve it" She was able to figure out a way to get it done. And she had a good, great attitude about it. And she really got after it from hard work, she communicated with everybody and we gave her that space to do it. And now

she's interacting with Lieutenant, Colonels on the Reg AF side to solve problems. And they're calling asking for her, right? It doesn't need to come to you or I to solve these problems and that's really important I think. And then relationships, obviously we can't do this alone, and being able to create a relationship that's meaningful and lasting. Really helps the team energize and solve their problems. - When you bring up that term team up. And it makes me think about a conversation we recently had with Colonel Janicki and Colonel Aslan as they've stood up to be leaders at the group level. And you know, one of the themes that was brought up in those conversations, I think it was with Colonel Janicki was team sports and then how to build teams and how that works together. What a lot of people probably don't know about you is your love for team sports. So I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit about that and maybe some of your thoughts on how teams work? - Sure, so I think tying back into the beginning, you asked about how I got here. I think that the being a team sport athlete, probably gave me the background thought process to make me successful, not knowing it way back then. And 'cause I think you can replicate through team sports, a number of problems that we see in the workplace. And if you talk about just relationships, being able to communicate, building trust, attitude, and effort. I mean, I still quote some of these things. I can hear my coaches now saying, "we're not gonna be the best team talent-wise, but we're gonna be in shape the best out of anybody in the league." And just ingraining that over and over again, that hard work, I think translates really nicely to what we do in the military and kind of what we expect. I expect people to work hard, I expect you to build trust, and then over and over again, you see it translate really nicely into military operational success and just listen to some folks that have separated or retired. What do they tell you that they miss? - The team cohesiveness, that family feeling. - Absolutely. Now that doesn't mean you can't do that other ways and you can't be a good teammate because you didn't play team sports. I'm not saying that at all, but being part of something is really important. Whether that's a club activity, a group of people, and I know we do that differently now than I grew up. I played three team sports and then when I go out with my buddies together, all we did was sports and activities, that's what we did. My kids are different, right? But they're still teaming when they're playing video games and I still force them to do at least one team sport just for that, just to get those experiences. - Right. Agreed. Those are some key pieces that you just wouldn't learn otherwise. And again, like you said, it doesn't mean that you have to be part of a team sport, but there are definitely some lessons that that provides at an early age. You talked about coach's quotes. The thing that always rings in my head from back in high school and team sports with my coach, "if you're not training your opponent is." And that still goes today. If we're not practicing, if we're not training here in prepping for being on the battlefield, I can guarantee that our enemy is every day and maybe twice a day, right? - Yeah, that's absolutely correct. I mean, that translates. - And one thing I'd like to highlight too, if I can answer is that, leadership, when we talk about developing leadership, we talk about how they're kind of setting the tone, but leadership in a team is not always being at the top it's how do we balance out those relationships as you pointed out? How do we communicate what those expectations as the captain of that team, right? - Yeah, and I think sometimes it is, you know, being the ra ra guy or gale up in front of the team,

trying to get them excited. Sometimes it's pulling somebody aside and saying, "Hey, we need more out of you. Like I need you to step up, the whole team's counting on you to do this function or that function. Maybe it's going to the guy in charge the coach, or maybe if you're not the leader, formal leader, you go to a formal leader and say, "Hey, this is happening, like we need your help here." Or maybe it's just stepping out of the way. Yeah, I'm just saying, you know what? Time for me to step aside, time for somebody else to lead, because they're better at it. And just getting out of the way and supporting them. - And I think that helps with identifying some talents and then also expertise in certain areas, right? The challenge there is, I think that me personally looking back into my history that Staff Tech Sergeant, or you're feeling like I'm confident in what I'm doing, I'm supposed to be the knowledgeable one. I'm supposed to be the one that leading and then learning that lesson of leadership is not necessarily by dragging everybody with you or getting your way, it's about identifying that airman so-and-so, and Sergeant so-and-so might have a little bit more expertise here. How about I just let them take the reigns and then facilitate some other barriers? - Yeah, I tell the story about when I was a Comm Squad commander, in Minneapolis and we went to Global Medic Fort McCoy, took the team down there to TDC equipment, doing some RF shots, multiple army units, Army 06 is running all over, Guard Unit's in, it's just kind of chaos. And I went down those first couple of days with the team got oriented and make sure they had what they needed. I went to the Army 06 in charge and said, "Hey, sir, I'm out" I was a major at the time I said, "Heading back, my team's got it, whatever you need. They're right here." I introduced them to Eric and Eric was a senior airman and I said, "Colonel, Eric's gonna be in charge, he's senior airman." He looked and said, "How many stripes is that?" And I said, "well, sir, that's a new four, he's got it. He's our team lead." And standing next to him was a Tech Sergeant and Staff Sergeant. And he said, "you're major and you're not gonna be here in charge." And I said, "nope." I said, "He's got it trust me, but here's my phone number. Here's my email, here's how to get ahold of me. Just trust me, they got it." And then at the end I drove back for the out brief and he was like, "man, we want Eric back. Like we want Eric back next year, to run it." And that just said, I mean, for him as a Reg AF army dude, he didn't get it. He thought leaders had to wear a rank. And that's not the case, especially I think with us 'cause he was bringing all this industry experience and he had this Reg AF experience and he had this kind of commanding, leadership calming presence that he could solve any problem. And his teammates know. And he knew his role as a senior airman, maybe he couldn't go to the Colonel and say, "Hey, there's an issue here." But he would prep up, you know, I'll call her Leslie, who is the ranking person at the time, she would go do the talking. But reality, he was the dude that was running it and everybody knew that. And so it was really fun to see that happen. - Right now, as the leader. I think that highlights a good piece of leadership there too so, right? So you may be the formal leader. You may have the rank, but when it comes to certain processes or portions of events, I use expeditionary Comm as a good example. And then my space expeditionary experience, you have different portions in prep for that mission. You have the planning cycle. So your logistic individuals, they are working through that. So again, they're the experts. They're gonna tell us how we're gonna get things from point A to point B in a case. Then we

get down on the ground and then we start setting up the site, you know, and then the equipment experts are the ones that are gonna set that up. And then we all prep it up to even having the Deployment Commander. The Deployment Commander doesn't have to be there. The ranking NCO isn't the one that's telling you, "I need things from point A to point B, and this is how you're gonna do it" necessarily. They're hitting that expertise across that whole team to then come to the point where now we're fully operational, they're handing over that site to the Deployment Commander and saying, "Here you go, sir or ma'am this is your site. And here we go." And it took all of those small pockets of leadership and development to get us from all our gear in a warehouse, somewhere to out in the field, fully set up and ready to execute that mission. - Yeah, I think it's probably not always been like that. I think in Space and Cyber and maybe some other crucials too that it really can happen where the person that is the expert is the leader and they're the one doing it the right way. Oftentimes I'll talk to civilian people and they're like, well, "you just give orders all the time." I'm like, "well, that's not what leadership is about." It's about putting people in the right places to be successful. And that's really what I wanna focus on, is try to be that screen, that front door, and get rid of the chaff and create clear paths for people to be successful. An organization to be successful, well, we need everybody to be in the right spot. On the bus, the bus is going the same direction. So we're all in the same bus, we're all in the seats. And sometimes, I'll lead from, I'll be driving the bus. Sometimes I'll be sitting in the back with my feet up throwing spitballs at people. And sometimes I'll be in the middle, sometimes I won't be on the bus. And then I'm gonna try to navigate those times when it's time to do that for other people. Because I think we all need to be thinking about, who's the next Chief Howard? Who's the next Rick Erredge? And we have to be prepping them for that opportunity when it comes. - That's a good analogy. It's kind of funny; you know, I kinda think of national influence as summer vacation, some good things. - That's one version, right? There's probably some leadership lessons, and Chevy Chase in there. - Definitely a lot, don't leave that leash to the bumper. But you know, I don't wanna take up all of your day, sir, as we get through this, you know, there's a lot of things that still needs to be done every day, but is there anything you might want to leave your airmen with, with this particular podcast? - Well, I think we need diversity of thought. And I think with diversity of thought, there's a lot of ways to get after that. We're gonna try to figure out how to do that, but we're really going to try to work hard to provide the resources you need, the leadership that we need in the engagement above wing-level to make sure that again, we're gonna stay relevant, whatever our missions are and that we find the right spaces to grow and continue to maturity. I mean, you think about it, we're still less than two years away. And we got a lot of gaps and seams that we need to try to fix, and we're gonna try to just be very deliberate in how we do those and methodical. And we're gonna try not to run, but I have this overall sense that, I want the wing to run now from the crawl, walk, run phase. And I feel like we're really close. We got a lot of good leaders in place, I'm gonna continue to grow people and clear the path for the airmen to do the job they can get after. - I get the same sense, right? That we're on the precipice of running. I can kind of feel it, like you're on the starting line. That's awesome, sir. I know that, I just would like to take the opportunity to thank all our airmen for their dedication,



to the mission and dedication to their country, and I hope everything's going well for them during this time with Covid and everything. - Yeah, sure. And understanding, life's hard and there's a lot of that talk about this a lot, there's a lot of other things people could do. 'Cause America's great place and you don't have to come in on Saturday and Sunday in order to have a great life. They're airmen so I'm gonna thank them and make sure to thank their families and make sure that, they know we got their back and we know we're not perfect. We know we got a lot of things we need to fix, but it's just not gonna be Rick Erredge and Chris Howard fixing them. And so we need everybody to take ownership of problems and then create those outcomes that impact everybody and people step up and take advantage of opportunities, and solve problems. (Upbeat music)