

Ep. 67: Introducing the 42nd Cyber Operations Squadron

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Welcome to another episode of the Sword and Shield. I am Chief Master Sergeant Christopher Howard. 960th Cyberspace Operations Group Superintendent. And with me today I have Lieutenant Colonel Steven Chetelat, the commander of the 42nd cyberspace operations Squadron. Chief Michael Jimenez, Superintendent, 42nd Cyber Operations Squadron and senior enlisted leader. Oh yes senior enlisted leader in a couple days. Uh as well as Lieutenant Colonel Jeremiah Flerchinger, senior Director of Operations and Jack-of-all-trades for the 42nd COS, which as I understand is your favorite squadron at Scott Air Force Base maybe, you know. Well definitely my favorite 960th cog unit at Scott Air Force Base for sure. Hands down whole-heartedly. Yes sir. Well gentlemen, I really do appreciate you taking some time today to discuss the 42nd with our listeners. You know, we've interacted a number of times over the last year, two years and uh every time we talk, I'm thoroughly impressed with what you guys do every day. So um I really love you guys to just open up the doors and let our listeners know a little bit about your unit. So can you explain to the gladiators out there? What does your unit do? Well basically where U. S. Cyber comes arm uh into on and through the Air Force networks and systems under F cyber. So we have the Air Force reserves first and only defensive cyber protection team or at least we provide forces for three cyber protection teams. There are Total Force Association with the eight 35th cyber Operations Squadron. Uh but we conduct threat focused intelligence driven hunt Clear, enable hardening and assess missions. And that's done both deployed and in garrison depending on upon the exact details of where we're going and what we need to look at. Okay, so from a layman's perspective, what does that really look like you guys are that forward reaching arm. Right. That goes through the network, correct? We put sensors on partner networks and we hunt the networks to look for bad characteristics, threat vectors that Intel things. Maybe there identify vulnerabilities within the systems. Report on whatever it is. We happen to find and give recommendations to fix. Okay, you guys are the detectives and some of the security all mixed into one then correct? And it's not all back from here in Garrison. You know, we have a mini warehouse filled with pelican cases and rex of our weapons systems that we will pack up if we don't already have our hooks somewhere into whatever system we're looking at that we can filled out across the world. Dropping in notes that we can get the best view of what's going on and do a little bit of forensics. Right? And for the geekier ones out there, you guys are the reserves only

cpt, correct? Yeah, we man the C P. T. S. We work with a 35th to man 853854 and a 55 C P. T. S. So that gives us a good range of different missions. We can go on A 53 has a focus on I. C. S. K. To 854 out there on cloud and 855 where we were mainly man as a kind of a jack of all trades going out to all different kinds of networks. So we get a nice range but anything that comes down to an Air Force focus CPT US partners with a 35 get to go out on those missions. Okay, so a lot of individuals don't understand what a CPT is. Um they've heard things like CPT MBT. Can you help me describe that to our listeners? What the differences between like a C. P. T. And an MBT by change? Well, a cpt with a U. S cyber construct where we have a planning team, we have a leadership team and we have three mission elements underneath that. Typically two are only activated at least within the Air Force at a time. But they have individuals that are specialist on the actual nodes and systems and computers as well as individual specialist in network traffic and the operations related to that. We're a little bit of the heavy hitter hitters as opposed to uh the MDT s. So the copts if there's a nine line that goes up, they'll be called in to look at a problem that the MVPs couldn't solve or you know, local cyber operators couldn't look at to see if there's a bad guy in there. If there's some sort of a threat vector going on the M. P. T. S uh that's more of focused against other weapons systems capabilities within other match com. So you might have a mission defense team that is focused on a specific airframe. So you know, maybe KC 1 35. You have a team that focuses on that and all the systems that touch the aircraft and are used for the authorities for that aircraft. Those mission defense teams would be the cyber defenders specifically for that. Okay, right, so they're like more of uh the guards are sitting around the let's say an F 16 on a on a flight line versus uh you which is more of a strike team. Yeah, I think that's a good way to describe it. I think CPT they're a little bit more mobile. We can go to different mission set so we're not focused in on one as colonel coaching were described. An MDT is assigned to a wing and therefore that wings mission and so they just focus on however that wing wants to use them where we take our orders from cyber, calm down through a cyber and we can work on, we're in particular focused on air force networks. There are C P T. S that are focused on dot networks at a higher level and therefore any agency that follows under JFK HQ didn't. And then you have C C T. S that are focused on co commission. So there's a Transcom one, there's about to be a cyber COM CCT We're focused on air force terrain. So things like Air Operation Centers, Missile defense system Ic escada like we were talking about or being called in when, when there is a difficult problem or a special situation, especially with exterior threats on Mdt is very focused on his mission, knows its terrain very well. And ideally we'll be able to work in concert with them because we have more and more resources and broader access to hey what the threat environment looks like. It's converging on their mission set. And we do partner with the mission defense teams when we go out the door because no one should know the terrain that we're going to operate in better than that. MBT. Because that should be there day in day out life. So we'll go out, we'll interview them early on in the mission, Get an idea of what kind of space we're operating in. Uh and then as we operate in that space will bring the MBT along and kind of hone their skills a little bit more. Get them a little bit more familiar with the tools. Okay, awesome. I mean all of that just really encompasses a lot of working, a lot of

experience and some very important work there. So what if the seas do you guys use uh in your unit to get after that work? We have 17 sierra cyber ops officers, one bravos for cyber ops, we have three deltas there, uh cyber support but there are network text and our maintainers. So they maintain our weapons system. So if you're looking at a kind of a flight construct, the 17th heroes and one bravos are the ones that fly the planes. But the three deltas are the ones that work on the plane and make sure it's there and ready to go wherever we're deploying to. We also have one ends. So Intel they're the ones that kind of drive everything that's a huge refocus how we do work to have Intel on the front end identifying threats that are most likely and have the highest impact and then getting those enemy. Coa's to everyone else to kind of drive what TTP s we use on a mission. Okay, awesome. We start breaking that down. Right. We know that those three deltas are going to go to one delta sevens. But currently, what three delta Fc's specifically do you guys have, we have primarily three D one in the cyber transport area? We have three D. 05 to six admins and then we have the three D. 05 threes doing the cyber security peace honestly here to be completely frank about it. The FCS bleed together. They all end up regardless of their tech school or what their specific KFC is. They end up learning the weapons system and being primarily focused on maintenance. That's one reason we're trying to transition more to that three D one career field, the 31 X two way. We and at least keep the same flavor and the same upbringing. We're going to see how that works with this one delta seven transition and see if we can't use that kind of to our advantage to bleed together there. But we do have the three different flavors of three delta currently transitioning towards the one. Okay, I will say three deltas do a lot of normal, I will say network analysis type mission as well. We have three deltas go down, we have some right now down to the schoolhouse, do an initial qualification training so they can go out and do a very similar missions. The one bravo four-network analyst position. Well, okay. And you know, we also know that there's different flavors or different trade outs for the one ends as well. That Intel side. So what kind of Intel airmen are you looking for on the Intel were completely want to know who do a lot of the briefing report writing and back in analysis is Colonel clutching their kind of alluded to. There's been a huge shift over the last couple of years in that upfront research and making sure that where we're going as an Intel threat associated with it and that's driving the mission a lot of that happening partnered with our Intel bodies get grouped in with the active duty at a group level 5 67 group has an Intel cell that is pulling this Intel together and we play a major role within that. But when we get on a mission they're digging down into what the adversary GSR and really guiding the echoes or the areas that our analysts are going to be looking at and driving that mission and where it's going no makes sense. Right? So yeah, when you look at the terrain that Intel is key to success, right? When we look at this domain and we look how the environment sits out there not having clear information from Intel, not having a good idea of what things look like. Or even driving back to your guys conversation about how the N. D. T. S. Understand what that landscape is and then providing that Intel, all of that together leads to that success with that CPT correct. Very much so. Um originally it was almost, well it seems like previously was almost like go out into a country and find things. Whereas now with a little bit more of a Intel focus its, you know, go into this town, look for a

red ford. It's probably on a road or in a garage. That's a huge difference. Yeah, we used to have a morale patch here and I'm still wearing occasionally that basically is just a person screaming, saying cyber all the things because that's what it used to be. When we get mission, they would say just go to this basin, look for something that was very little specific and now we have much clearer Intel telling us specifics of an adversary, the type of adversary and then what their typical go to T T. T. S. R. Yeah, now it makes sense. That makes completely sense. So with not kind of moving forward when we talk about your unit specifically what is the day in the life look like for your members there at the 42nd. Well, it kind of depends um depending up on what sort of status hearing currently we are broken into functional flights though, that's something we did in about the last year. So we have post cyber operators, we have network cyber operators, we have Intel, we have the maintenance and network text as well as training and operations flights. The operations flights, it has, it has a crew of members that are rotational E matrix from the other flights with the intent to mobilize to sustain whatever year round taskings we have. The other flights. They conduct training plant, they develop and conduct training plans to mature the tradecraft and the TTP s we have. Other than that we're kind of looking at U. T. A. S. We we've done a huge shift obviously to virtual U. T. S. And we found a lot of benefits from that, a lot more flexibility and being able to set up computer networks and enclaves and simulators that seem to run better or more easily off the AFP net than on. Uh And I think we've got enough of a good standard battle rhythm going between these that we get lots of heavier training that we did previously during you, though those are primarily readiness and continuation training focus though. Yeah, that flexibility is key, right? Having a little bit of flexibility allows maximizing your training time, helps maximize usage of T. R. S. Time. Um and all of that comes into play with good morale. Right? Absolutely. We saw this past year lots of feedback with morale increasing exponentially from what it was in the past awesome. We would like to have more in person events just so we can see people face to face more than we have because there are some people that I've seen their names time and time again but they came into the unit post. Covid, I came in like a couple months beforehand and individuals I've never seen their faces. So it's a little disheartening for that impact morale lightly. But we're looking at next month and the month after that, having quite a few people in awesome. Yeah, I can completely relate. You know, when we look at how we've pushed more towards virtual with everything going on in the world, it does challenge that interaction and being able to kind of work together as a team. But you guys have definitely made that work virtually for the training uh and keeping the mission forward. So, congratulations to you there when it comes to the interpersonal peace. I think we all is Airman are kind of reeling back from some of those deficiencies. But I am hopeful that in the future that things will get better, that's for sure. So, you know, going back into the morale peace and kind of bringing all that together. What do you as a unit specifically due to develop your members? Right. We're talking mission wise and just career wise as an airman. Yeah, so definitely two different ways to tackle that. So on the career side, you know, we try to make sure to monitor members. They've been here for a while. So we're getting about that five-year mark. We have some members who have been either a DRS before men on mission for a while and then a mix of obviously new members

going through training. So we try to do is make sure we have a good pipeline for them through the squadron. So if they come in and they do host analysts or network analyst that from a technical standpoint, we're moving them maybe between the two or making them go up in tears. So from cyber com level, there's a basic senior and master level operator or you want to make sure they're advancing in that pipeline or if after a while they reached that senior level and they want to try on the network side or the host side, depending on where they're at, they can move over and then for those members that have been here for a while that we're moving them up into instructor rolls or stand of our roles and making sure that they progress and then doing so advanced the unit because they're furthering those same things I'd say from a professional development standpoint, we're continuing to grow as a unit in the fact that we have are rising six council and they're pretty active. They meet every single month from the senior N. C. O. Standpoint, we're ingrained into the eight 35th mission and we still hold meetings on our UTA weekend and we make sure that we are furthering our senior NCO's from not just the T. F. A standpoint but also there on the UTA weekends and giving them opportunities to excel and leadership opportunities and then we also have a career vectoring board which I'll give kudos to the 23rd originally had presented this idea, send us some documentation and we kind of formed it into here at the 42nd. So still in a breast practice the best practice from them. I myself really like that. I've set in on a few. We do kind of a records review for anyone that comes up for it. We look at the resume and we really get a feel for where they want to go next and look at possible shortcomings in the record. Some things they need to bolster because a lot of it, you know may not be obvious for someone who hasn't seen it before. So a little bit of mentoring. They're absolutely yeah. We give them that third party look I guess you would say where you know a leader gives them an E. P. R. And a feedback session. But this is this is a broader look where people can look in and say hey if you're really trying to go for that you need to add in some of these you know groups or wing level activities and things and infected them and in a good way and point them in the direction that they want to go And that helps us as leadership because we now know where members are going wanting to go and not treating every individual is just this blanket cookie cutter program. We know if they want to be a first started, we convict around this way or they're aiming for commissioning that we can take that into account when we're doing unit activities and then we've also grown to where we're doing flight based professional development. So not only engaging at the wing and the group with the Professional development council, but we also have professional development happening at the flight level and that gives us a good variety. So we're giving airman and N. C. O. S. A chance to lead and to put those together and it can be based on topics that they do in their civilian life or just something that they're passionate about if it's finance or investing, topics like that. And what we found is that's really open up the aperture of the, you know, the leadership training that we're doing in the professional development that we're doing on UTA weekends because then we let other flights, if you want to go to some other flights, professional development training, they can go to that. So trying to hit it on multiple fronts very engaged on the volunteer efforts. Were engaged with a nonprofit called Cyber Up and we do a lot of mentoring in the in the local community through that

program and different programs that we use. So I'd also say it's all not structured and all not very very strict. I'd say it's a little bit more of our informal culture as well. One of my favorite professional development tools is actually are you ta tacos so Saturday UTA weekend I guess at one point they actually had real tacos and sat around and ate them and just talk about whatever problems. But now we have UTA virtual tacos where we all die alone on teams, get the camera up, you know, sit there with whatever your favorite beverages and tacos or burgers. If you don't feel like tacos and just kind of chat about where you are, where you want to go, things that you think would be great for the squadron as a whole. Any more informal. What's the latest movie you watched or, you know? Yeah, that's probably what are probably good large percentage of it? Well, that's awesome. No, I mean a holistic approach to airman development, right? That's I think that's something that we miss sometimes, is that the interpersonal connection goes a long way and it doesn't always have to be very structured or based on a personal or professional goal. That human piece that piece where um you're building that report kind of goes to win. That question does come up that there is a degree of honesty and truthfulness and belief on one another that that kind of carries over from so kudos to you guys on that. That's awesome. You know, and it makes you makes you think that you guys have a lot of these different conversations and what airmen are looking for and you're kind of directing them in one direction or helping them find their way. What do you see is the future of your unit then big item mobilization, we're looking at 5 to 1 dwells. So six a six month period where people go out on mission uh and then 56 month periods where they're trying to ramp the readiness back up and get a little bit of R and R and reset. That would align better to our active duty mission partner where there is an ongoing annual campaign plan that we have to get at. But we think mobilization for us or at least trying to frame ourselves in that manner, we'll add a lot of a good solid foundation where we can meet that and contribute the mission. Besides that, we're looking at a new crew and crew position evils trying to formalize that a little bit more than it has been, has been continuously evolving and trying to improve our training. That's an ongoing process. It seems like you have to run ever so fast to stay right where you're at and that maturing TTP s checklists. Yeah, I think, I think if you look at where the unit that we're getting to that point are manning is getting to a level where we're getting more and more trained members and so we can focus, we're hitting the ground running. Now, we're getting to that point where we're going to start being more focused on operations and getting more members into the mission where to this point has been very focused on hiring and training at that initial level. We still have some of that to do. But if you look at cyber com cyber com level this is a growth industry if you will and I expect to see it grow exponentially even for us on the reserve side that that need for reserve support on C. P. T. S is just gonna grow cybercrimes adding 14 C. P. T. S I think is what I saw. The latest number was released. Okay so continuing to grow that mission, continuing to show that the reserves can be successful in this mission is going to take everything Colonel flirting. I was just talking about honing our training, getting our members focused on better training and getting our civilian members who do this out in the commercial side to show what they can bring to that mission. And I think over the last year we've been very successful with that and it's just going to continue in the future now that they

think now that cybercrimes got in a little taste of what the reserves can bring to this fight. They just wanted more of it. Lots of by name, request for M. P. A. For individuals with particular skill sets. Absolutely. And then as we find out more what those skill sets are that's just going to grow. No I fully agree. I think that there is a wide-open field for reserve citizen Airman engaging in this mission set and that yeah I said that the environment is endless. It's only the demands only going up uh and the resources are already tightened strained, so right now it may be more maturing as opposed to growing, but the fact that we're getting more and more people that who have at least been through initial skills training, uh it lessens the burden and has them where they're a little bit closer to hitting the ground running and all of this. I think we're focused on trying to provide a fantastic environment for our airmen where they can come in, they can get some really good high level training um and then use it um in in predict with predictable timing in really exciting mission. Um and then go back to doing more of that high value training and providing that training off to the next generation and you know, building a bigger environment where we're pulling folks in from throughout the 19 sixties and throughout Africa and sending those folks out as well to really raise the level of our ability to uh to effectively space operations roger that awesome, awesome gentlemen. I really do appreciate you guys sharing all of this about the 42nd. Is there anything that you would like to tell our listeners as we close out this podcast today? Colonel Chetelat, I'm just grateful for the opportunity to be here and I do want folks to know that um we're as a unit. Um we're excited as we're moving forward to really blazing new trails and I think going where the most exciting places that the fabric cyber is ready to go and, and we're trying to make sure that we're carrying the flag for that. And so it's a great opportunity for our men to, to be at the forefront, um, to learn tons of good stuff to make a big impact in, to grow as people under there and awesome chief, you guys say that Uh yeah, no, that's like everything the commander just said, I'd say when I got into cyber about 13 years ago I had a leader that said this is Billy Mitchell stuff that we were doing and I still feel that same fervor if you will right now. It feels like we are blazing new trails, doing awesome things. I'd say to anybody listening, if you want to try a new mission, it is beautiful up here, especially coming October November and these are going to start turning to them. Yeah, starting to turn right now, beautiful! Come up, check out the unit. Glad to have anybody that wants to try to get in this mission, contact me, contact leadership here. And even if it's not the 42nd, recommend everybody, go look outside the norms of what you've been doing on mission over time, try to expand that out, trying to units, trying new things and help us expand cyber, bring your experiences to other units that has helped us grow over the last couple of years and is made for an exciting time here at the 42nd. So just appreciate your time today. Listen to our story and look forward to talking to people following this. Awesome Colonel Flerchinger. Yeah, I have to agree with all of that. We're always looking for good people with interesting, diverse backgrounds because it takes the perspective from all of those best thing. The best stuff we get is often from people from outside of the norm. I myself, I have a space Intel and engineering background from active duty before I came over here, but it's not just about us stealing all the talent. Yeah, we do want lots of talents. We do want people that are willing to take initiative and grow the

unit stronger. But also we're looking for exchanges between squadrons and places that we can send people elsewhere for growth. So I've enjoyed the opportunities here. I think there's lots of good stuff going on and lots of good opportunities going forward. Awesome. Thank you gentlemen. Really do appreciate everything you shared with our listeners today, phenomenal. You guys are doing some great work up there, exciting work. I look forward to seeing how you guys take this mission to the next step. Gladiators! Thank you for your service. Thank you for your dedication and thank you for being great airman. Remember let's get after Gladiators and stab our enemies in the face through cyberspace.