

Ep. 10: Two Units, One Goal

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All right welcome to another episode of the Sword and Shield. Uh, this is Chief Master Sergeant Howard, uh acting uh command chief and superintendent of the 960th COG and today with me I have... hi I am Command Chief Shana Cullum, the 433rd Airlift Wing command chief. Thanks for having me over no I appreciate it chief um you know just to kind of frame it out a little bit the 433rd is uh here on JBSA with us and you are our supporting partner uh within the reserves here at JBSA correct we are and uh right um and I just wanted to talk today about uh some of the relationships that we have and then how the two wings work and kind of um some of the nuances between the wings so how long have you been here so I've been here right at two years now oh wow yep it's gone fast gotcha very fast uh can you kind of give me your perspective of um what that relationship was uh two years ago between the 960th and the 433rd I can so actually it goes back a little bit before that when I found out that I was coming here from Westover I was talking to chief Tomlinson he was the first sergeant fam at the time and when he heard I was coming to Lackland he asked me to reach out to chief Zabala um who when the 960th was still a group right at that at that point and he said that there was a lot of stress between the between the group and the wing and uh we knew that the 960th was going to grow into a wing very quickly shortly after I got here but um I think it I think it makes sense to talk about where we came from right to get to where we are right now um two and a half years ago three years ago four years ago when the 940 or the 960th was a group just starting and they awkwardly placed a group that falls under 10th air force under a fourth air force asset um for us to support um but the all of the unknowns um created a lot of friction um and the two leadership teams back then probably did not communicate as well as um could have been gotcha um and we ran into struggles of um and it was learned as we go the you know pass codes the fourth air force um math doesn't have access to tenth air force group pass codes passwords to our passcodes to be able to support LRS I mean you guys were deploying and our LRS couldn't supply uniforms because we couldn't see any of your folks because they had different passcodes right so um I know that was one area of contention and um med group trying to get the communication lines and those records to be able to cross flow so we could see the uh 960th paperwork I mean that was it seems very fundamental but it was a huge issue right um and uh um the 433rd was not manned to the manning to support the extra group um initially wasn't laid in um so they were struggling uh it created a lot of contention so that was three four years ago um you know and you and then you put the um uniqueness of all the GSUs right um working a completely different mission set there's just a lot of a lot of ingredients for a very bad recipe if you will um but I really

think in the last two and a half years there has been we've grown leaps and bounds um the relationship the um communicating between the new sets of leadership groups and trying to work those hurdles now we know what the hurdles are right but where we are right now I think we have um do I think we have a lot of a lot of uh space to get better most definitely but I think I think the communication between the leadership teams are about as good for my perspective anyways you guys haven't told us any different so um from my perspective um is probably the best that it has been since the 1960th um sprouted so right yeah it's yeah from my perspective right so uh come November will be two years as a wing right so we uh we were activated in November of 18 um and we were stood up we went from the group to the wing um so that brought its own growing pains as well as the previous growing pains you know you hit on GSUs we have 10 different GSUs spread across the continental us so that's a that's a big muscle movement for anybody let alone when we start adding some of those other pieces that that you discussed where we talk about the chain of information from the fourth air force the chain is the of information from the 10th air force what requirements are for simple processes you know let's take uh step two it was one of the most recent processes um sometimes um when it comes to programs like that you your math has a certain way that they want to see uh items and how do you get uh some of those um opportunities and then the 10th does it a little bit differently those minor nuances when it comes to the single FSS that we use under the 433rd can be very problematic if they got a set of rules from their leadership uh from your wing and then from your NAF then we come in with a totally different uh looking package now that bro uh brings uh where do we deconflict those problems so it's as a training situation where we have to explain how um the 10th uh air force looks at it differently and this is the requirements um while still meeting the intent of the force so why are they different right why is it so different when it's going to ARPC um you know and that I think that's one of the key pieces there but when it comes to the to the leadership piece specifically I would say that uh since coming to the group in June um and even when I was at the unit prior to that that relationship between the 433rd and the 960 at um you know it's really easy for each side to throw spears right uh of how we look at it but uh being at the group I know that the conversations you and I have on the regular basis the fact that both wing leaderships talk weekly at a minimum if not multiple times a week I'd like to highlight covet as a good example when Covid really kicked off before that we were having at least once a week meetings with your staff right so we would come to your staff meeting and then we'd also have additional pre-UTA meetings that we would attend yeah um and your leadership team has uh specifically this leadership team with you and Col. McClain has made sure that we were invited to any of the meetings um that we had a seat at the table and that we were provided the same information as anybody else within the wing right so that goes a long way it's an equality thing right there right of that yes we acknowledge your wing euro wing and we know that we're sharing these resources um and then uh making sure that we were informed uh timely and kept in the loop but Covid specifically when things started really falling off right so when the stress starts to really ratchet up and uh we have a lot of constrained resources um your team made sure that we were included we were part of the cats we were getting

regular updates we were included in all of the stats when it came to how do we solve this problem 960th was always part of the equation when it came to those conversations as well as always part of the solution so you would reach out to us what do you guys see how would you like to do this do you want to be separate from us in doing this or would you like us to take this on right so you guys do take on a number of things to support us so that we're not doing uh double or triple the work right yeah so the step two process actually was an eye opener for me because when I got here um I didn't realize that there was even two separate processes so I work with the FSS and say this is how we're going to do it and then out of the out of the clear blue sky uh Chief Bischoff is like hey wait a minute we can't do it that way I didn't even realize that there were possibly two different processes right and it was it and it makes total sense um but that really opened up my eyes to I can't just assume um that that you all are doing the same thing that we are because we do we fall under two separate umbrellas um but you guys have made it so easy um and actually fun to interact um both you and chief bishop and colonel jones um and colonel ridge um but I so I don't I don't look at the 960th as um extra support I look at it as an extra resource okay um so the PDC is that the perfect example um you know we were trying to get that up and going and supply classes for basically seven classes a week that's seven hours of class that's a monumental one it was but we um both wings have had the Covid made a lot of our folks unemployed we needed a resource to get caught up on EPRs decorations a lot of people didn't know how to do that and we used that avenue but we did not have the people and the knowledge and the facilitators to get that PVC up and flying um to where it is today so I looked at the 960th as an extra resource yes we it's a it's a give and take but you guys have given back just as much as uh um as there has been support needed um was saying that I think we got a lot of room for improvement with you know the GSUs um it's difficult to support folks that you don't you've never seen you've never laid eyes on um that have a complete different mission um and you're not manned for so our FSS is manned really for about 23 to 2500 folks but they're supporting about 4 000 right um and when I say they're manned for that means they have the positions but that doesn't necessarily mean that they have the bodies filling those warm that are those positions right so um can we speak to that a little bit right so I kind of want to break that down so people understand um what this looks like right so the here's the ugly part of what's going on is um you know when we talk about that manning you might have on your UMD let's say just for a number say 20. Right and of that 20 it's a mixture of TRs ARTs and maybe AGRs so then let's say you have um you know four of those arts that are pulling MPA somewhere else now you're manned you're fully manned right but you don't necessarily have the um the body in the seat to do those problems right so I don't know if you could speak a little bit more to that so I don't I don't have the very specific numbers to each but um and I and I don't want him to speak there I know that uh the AGR conversion has helped us out a little bit okay um with getting those positions filled um you know the TRs um were sitting a little bit better but that's not helping our GSUs and the rest of our members going into going into a UTA when everything's hitting and now you got Covid where even and it'll be interesting to see I have complete confidence that we're we'll figure it out and get our airmen taken care of but it's not going to be an easy road because now we're

even there they're already short mans um and they were keeping up right by far not ahead and now we are way far behind even with the 433rd members so it is going to take some constant um all right no it's a it's a hairy situation when we look at it right um you know it's part of the nature of the reserves so we man enough full-time staff to keep the lights on and keep some of the processes moving so that we can prep for that surge capability through a UTA um bringing in our TRs so when Covid comes into play right so we were already built to be behind throughout the month catch up on the UTA on top of all the other requirements we put there right and then now we throw covet in there and we're doing it virtually we've got sporadic so when it comes to some of those support agencies they have specific systems that they have to access which may be a server or something or terminal in location so how do I get them to actually attack that terminal you know LRS is a good example of right um of having a specific terminal that they have to use for some of the movements if I don't get that that person in the seat then I'm even further behind if I'm not catching that up right it's very problematic yeah so we're looking at that we're already trying to project how we're going to get that fixed I don't know that it'll ever be 100 fixed but better um and you and I talked to chief white here several months back and addressed this and I think I think this comes back to the I don't think he completely at that point understood where we were manning wise until we talked to him when he was here on his visit and brought it to his attention and I know it's being talked about but um maybe this will be the answer maybe um to getting a 960 of FSS right yeah no I've seen a couple of medical claims or fill in the blank whatever that is so right um no great point right so when we talked to Chief White I think that because of our relationship it helps sell the point because it wasn't adversarial right it wasn't like you're not providing this or you guys are asking for too much or you're unrealistic it was no we agree here's the situation here's the good the bad the ugly um and I know that um Chief Loper prior to Chief Malcolm and Chief Malcolm now at the NAF have championed it and I believe that chief via is championing it from the fourth so now we've got two naps working in we've got two wings right um all addressing this to AFRC of we got that the construct worked well on paper right so we look at resources to understand why this decision was made um you know they figured that uh all that overhead that comes with the squadron right so if the 960th ends up getting their own FSS that comes with a certain amount of overhead right when we talk about leadership teams support staff things like that so when AFRC's manning the books and looking at those numbers they're looking at it okay I don't if I don't have that overhead I can put it here under the fourth thirty third add one or two bodies versus ten right so it's an easy numbers game um what that comes down to our individual airmen is um when that number game doesn't work out in their favor right um we see lags in things like um travel vouchers is which is one of the biggest ones within the 960s right and we've been lucky that those relationships have worked well um we've leveraged individuals we've been happy I hate to say approach some of some talent from your wing to come over and help support stand our things up well we don't mind sharing right we're good sharers um but uh I think we've done a really good job at phil it at trying to bridge that gap um with the communication and the relationships um that are being built but um I think that I think what I want the airmen to get most is we know their struggles we know that

we've got hurdles in front of us to overcome but hopefully you can look back and see where we were and where we are now and see that the huge improvement and we'll just keep we will keep continuing to talk communicate pushing it up the pushing it up the chain taking every opportunity um like when chief white was here to make sure that that everybody is aware of what's going on but in the meantime um how do we how do we take care of our airmen um and get it taken care of and I think we're doing a lot better job at that um as we continue to get the feedback um I think our two teams are doing the best we can to fill those gaps and right and I know um from your history in my history we both were uh you know first sergeants and uh together yes um but uh we would love to be able to just snap a finger or have an easy answer to make these problems go away right because you know we truly care about our airmen and we truly care about the situation um but um there's some barriers we just can't get past so I think it really comes to the relationship piece that uh the two wings have and building on that to make those improvements um when you're in that tactical level sometimes it feels like it should be easy right why can't I just get this one piece and I think that's important when we talked about um all those different nuances when we talk about the different naps we talk about the different wings the different processes then access to those passcodes little things that the small things that people don't see every day that cause some of those barriers right yeah so uh you know you hit on the PDC and kind of how we're coming together as two wings to produce that do you see any of the other things that we can work on as uh two wings to continue to improve um quality of access to development or life for both of the wings and the GSUs so what one of the things that the PDC has brought to light is how many really great airmen that we have out there that would have been that would have never been brought to the forefront if um if it if the PDC wouldn't have had to had to stand up the way that it did but it opens up so much more aperture outside of the PDC and weighing in on the civilian expertise that that a lot of our folks bring to the table that we don't realize because we see them two days two days a month or maybe three or four days a month um I I'm excited to see it's exciting um to bring the resources together but it's also just as exciting to see the 960th growing into itself and being able to be a um independent PDC as well I know you guys are doing a lot of things and I'm like hey I want to borrow that but it's it is more than just the PDC um itself um you know we there's been a lot of opportunities for our airmen to come over and not feel some of your MPA or our manning um deficiencies if you will um and we've gotten some of our airmen back that from the 960s that they are um they have grown um and that expertise and the different mission set right um that the 960th has and bringing that back over to the 930 or for to the 433rd um I just think it's I think it's a win-win um the other the other um areas where we lack or that we're having trouble with you know the you know medical whatever the case those things have just got to be worked at our level and continuously talked about and worked on but yeah I'm excited honestly the 960 it brings like a breath of fresh air and it's in it's forced the 433rd to realize that there's more outside of the 433rd and it's right in their backyard gotcha so um it's yeah I do like the cross utilization right so when you have two wings and two naps sitting in the same space right um you can really start cross utilizing knowledge experience and some of those great practices and we have been

lucky to be able to utilize some of your you know heavy hitters uh to help develop some of our processes and then we've been able to give opportunity to some of your airmen where um opportunity wasn't necessarily available uh in your wing and vice versa right so we have individuals that are getting kind of um stovepiped into a position right with uh your wing being right here um it's made it a lot easier and then uh of course we don't talk about the fact that we have other reserve units over at Randolph and things that that we start pulling back and forth from right and making it a pretty interesting location and the breath that that the breath of experience that's outside of their um I know you've got one individual she's working travel vouchers and has made a huge impact significant we're talking million-dollar changes right she's medical yep she she's one of our medical folks it's gonna be a diamond first sergeant too I know I heard um that's awesome um so reaching into to the different experiences and the breadth that that um the opportunities that we have I'm grateful for it I'm excited to see where we go in the future um and I want to thank the 960th leadership because you guys um uh you know yes we've thrown invites out there but it could have easily been oh no we're good um you guys have bit on every everything and um have really um been fun to work with uh and the floats last year was like the was really an icebreaker um because the 433rd we had the float we were going we were a little bit behind schedule and then and then all of a sudden the 960th comes in and picks it picks it up and really got everybody across the line um and it was phenomenal um but it opened up the opportunity for you guys this year right to well if we would have been able to have fiesta.

My hope is that that one float is right behind the other whether it's 433 or the 960 the other one's right behind or right in front of um so we can show that the team no I fully agree right so um that partnership has gone great and I want to thank you as well you and Col. McClain um specifically for opening your arms because it goes both directions right if you guys didn't want to be good mission partners you didn't have to invite us but you guys did yeah when we ask for support you guys are always readily available um when we have an issue you make sure we get the resources um you know it it's always at the leadership team level we always get a good reception we always get you know uh equal footing and that relationship has aided in so many of these uh little barriers we've talked about getting cleared out uh in a timely manner uh to get some of these things moving and help us hit some of those fires we know that there's a lot of growth to still be done sure um we know that it's not always pretty but uh it's one of those things that uh I wanted to make sure airmen know that we at the leadership level are at least having good conversations and working together as a team uh to work their problems to make sure that uh their quality of life um is there and that we're clearing those barriers that we have to so that they can get at the mission um so I do appreciate all of the stuff that you and your team do uh has done for us um and all the opportunities that you provide for us as well so I look forward to you know a few more years continuing that right yeah so um I don't know is there anything else you might want to tell the crowd um before we uh we sign off ma'am stay healthy stay strong and uh thanks for what you know just thanks our airmen um are just for the most part phenomenal human beings um and what the civilian experience brings to the table

um is you know I've been in 28 years now and I still get shocked at some of the folks I get to interact with and what they bring to the table it just blows my mind so um I'm thankful to be part of the team and the of the leadership team you know you're talking about it being easy and colonel McClain has a has a saying if it was easy mere mortals would do it um so but thanks for opening up this opportunity and uh I do plan on appropriating your uh you're not happy or not awesome kiosk out here is pretty awesome right now I want to thank you for your time um you know it's definitely something different um but like everything else we've done uh working as a team yeah um you know you at least you help us uh improve how we do business so thank you very much um and then of course thank to thank you to all the airmen out there that and their commitment to the mission their commitment to their country and their commitment to their fellow airmen so with that I think we'll send everybody off on a good day.