

Ep. 11: Women's Equality Day at the 960th CW

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[Samantha] Good morning, Gladiators. Welcome to this edition of the Sword and Shield. My name is Samantha Mathison. I am the 960th Cyberspace Wing chief of Public Affairs. And today I will be hosting this episode because Colonel Erredge and Chief Howard decided that we wanted to cover Women's Equality Day. So I have with me here today... - [Gonzalez] Captain Jamillah Gonzalez, 960th Cyberspace Wing executive officer. - [Elspeth] Tech Sergeant, Elspeth Moleno from the 50th Network Warfare Squadron and the cyber defense analyst. - [Tiffany] And I'm Tech Sergeant Tiffany Paddock from the 50th Network Warfare Squadron. I'm also a cyber defense analyst, but I'm a cross trainee from the mental health career field. - [Samantha] Awesome, I'm so glad you are all able to join me today as we talk about Women's Equality Day (laughing). I know I'm a bit of a dork, but whatever. So Women's Equality Day is celebrated in the United States on August 26th. And it's basically to commemorate the 19th amendment, which allowed women the right to vote. And so that's just what we want to talk about today. We want to talk about, here in the wing, how some of us women, ladies, feel about women's equality in this day and age. It's been a hundred years since women were granted the right to vote here in the United States. It's just an important thing to talk about to see and to feel and to know just what it is like for women currently, right? So Captain Gonzalez, do you wanna talk about a little bit how you feel about being a woman in the military, a woman of color and an officer. - [Gonzalez] So I brought along with me, on the 14th of August, 2020, the Department of Defense published a memo called Defense Women's Equality Day. So they provided a theme and this year's theme is, "Valiant Women of the Vote." And it recognizes that women far from the right to vote, but it also recognizes that this day has expanded beyond just discussion of the right to vote and also just women's equality as a whole and acknowledging what has been accomplished over the years and then what is still needing to be accomplished. So I think it just means so much more now than a 100 years ago when it was just acknowledging, "Hey, we finally got the right to vote." - [Samantha] Awesome, Sergeant Moleno, what do you think about that? - [Elspeth] Definitely appreciate the background the past a hundred years, Captain Gonzalez. My feelings on that especially the right to vote are very important to me. Myself, I am an Asian American; I'm a naturalized citizen. So that means I immigrated here with my mom when I was very young. Went through the process of legally obtaining US citizenship. So I'm definitely proud to be American. And very, very thankful for the life and opportunities that has given me here in the US. And it's one of the reasons why I joined the Air Force. The fight for equality has been an uphill battle, definitely

realized a hundred years. 1920 was when the amendment was ratified. But it wasn't until the Voting Rights Act of 1965 where everyone of all color races, origin, all were allowed to vote. So by honoring our history and the legacy of all the women, the American women before us, who fought for our rights. And like you said, not just the right to vote, but everything else that comes with equality in the States. By having our conversation now and remembering the past and just being open about this, it brings awareness to the current struggles that we have today. The Me Too movement that's recently been happening in the last couple of years. - [Samantha] Yeah, that was big (laughs). - [Elspeth] Yeah, bringing awareness to women's equality in that sense. Like Captain Gonzalez had brought up earlier, trafficking and exploiting women are, I don't know the percentage numbers, but we are the biggest victims of human trafficking. So that's another battle there, despite continue the fight for equality for women. And I guess to sum it up just being open minded and changing our attitudes and implementing new ideas so that we can create a better society for our people or for women. So that we can get closer to progressing and evolving, right? And continue that movement for equality. - [Samantha] Awesome, you brought up a lot of good topics just now (laughing). And now I'm like, Oh what questions should I ask because... But I didn't know that you were a naturalized citizen here in the United States and that's awesome. What was that experience like for you to come over and basically change your entire life? - [Elspeth] Yeah, so I want to say that I love my mom very dearly and I have great respect for her because she brought me over when I was five, six years old. So I didn't really know, really anything. I was under her wing, but she worked hard. And it's not cheap. It's not easy to obtain citizenship, right? You have to pay for the petition to get a green card, and then you have to wait the amount of years. My mom worked two, three part time jobs. I know as an immigrant you can't really get a good paying job. So she fought hard, tooth and nail, to make sure she brought me here to give me a better future. And as me and my brother, we both serve in the Air Force. I'm a Reservist, but he's active duty and he's been, he loves his career. He loves his country too just as much as me. - [Samantha] That's awesome. Captain Gonzalez, what are you gonna-- - [Gonzalez] Yeah, I definitely, hearing your story, I think it brings to mind, my mom was an immigrant when she came to this country. I was born here. But having a female role model to me as there was my mother who was very independent and did those same type of things of having to transition herself and her family over to this country, just kind of... I never, I guess thinking about equality, I never felt that I wasn't equal to my male, to anyone that I saw that was male. And I think it just kind of may have been because I saw a woman working in the workforce, providing for her family. So when I look at this and just acknowledge that not necessarily did everybody have that experience of maybe a strong person in their home that was a female and they're a female to really see and say, what are the, yes, there's differences between males and females, but when it comes to work and life, we can be equal, we are equal. And there's so much to come from that. - [Samantha] Yeah, role models are extremely important, not just to us women, but to every child growing up. And I think mothers definitely have a huge impact on children. Sergeant Paddock, what do you think? - [Paddock] Actually I think, because I come from sort of a different military background, being that I've spent 11 years in

the medical career field, and of course of the 20% of women in the Air Force, majority of them likely are in the medical career field. But I often found myself where every single person in my chain of command was a woman. And even having some young male airmen that maybe weren't happy about that. And they'd say, "Well, I don't have anyone "to look up to "because everyone on my chain of command is a woman." And why can't we look up to these women that are taking on great leadership roles, that are serving their country. And they're doing an amazing job. They can be everything from a flight chief all the way up to a group commander. And now as we've seen, the chief of staff of the Air Force is a female as well and an Asian American. So we have examples everywhere. - [Samantha] Yeah, I mean you touched on something really great too. Having representation in our leadership is very, very important. So in some ways I can relate to maybe what some of your young male airmen have said, like, "I don't see anyone in my leadership "that's like me." So it is important to have that representation, but I think you're also correct too in like, just because someone is a different gender doesn't mean you can't look up to them, right? So it's natural kind of to think that gender is important when it comes to your role models, but at the same time, it's not. It depends on the person. And it depends on who the role model is. And it depends on your environment and how you grew up in your culture. I mean, there's so many different factors that go into, in each individual person's personality for lack of a better way of putting it. - [Interviewee] Right. - [Interviewee] But I think you bring a good point that even today you can hear maybe some males and females saying, "Well, because I don't see myself "in the same gender, "that it's creating a barrier for me to understand "how I can see them as a role model." And so, earlier when we were talking about being younger, you really don't know what you don't know. And to your point, Sam, as we get older, we're able to say, "Yes, that's a male leader. "And these are the qualities "in that individual's leadership style "that I'm taking to note. "And it has nothing to do with their gender. And this is a female leader that has these qualities and I'm taking them to note. But I do think that that is the difference that you can acknowledge maybe as you develop and you get older, not when you're a small kid and you just like, "Oh, that lady looks like me, "and look, she's the president." You're not gonna have that, "Oh, they have this quality "that's allowing them to reach their full potential." - [Samantha] Yeah, one of the things that you, I don't remember who brought it up earlier. Sorry, but it was brought up earlier, in an earlier conversation was the great things about being a woman in the military is that we are guaranteed equal pay to our peers because the rank structure is a static thing. What do you-all think about that? - [Interviewee] So I think at this time in the military, that is one of the progressive parts that I can say that I see that we can acknowledge. Of course some of us that have been in Reserve and worked in the private sector that it hasn't come up to that same level. I think it facilitates in the military to know, for everyone, the males and the females, to say, because of where I've reached in my career I'm being paid and compensated the same as my peer. And so I think it unites in a sense that peer mentality to say, we're both tech sergeants, we're both captains, we're both performing our functions and we're compensated equally. And I think of how that impacts in the private sector where it is at times, I'm a female and you're a male and we work in the same job and I'm possibly working harder and outperforming,

but I'm compensated less because of the fact that we had not reached that equality yet across the board and outside of the military. - [Samantha] You bring up a lot of great points there. And one of the great difficulties, I think too is women and men aren't the same. And so I think equality a lot of times is misunderstood and misinterpreted as this concept where we have to be treated the same. And that, I don't really think that's the case. I think equality for me, when you say equality, I think, do we have the same opportunities? Are we treated the same when it comes to things that are in our control? And for instance, this is something that we talked about a little bit earlier, the ability to give birth children. Men obviously do not have this ability, we as women, we do. And it happens all the time, right? Because that's the cycle of life. So in regards to things like that, a lot of times us as women, we do get treated differently and whenever we get pregnant, depending on what job we're in, we do get treated differently. I used to be a maintainer way back in the day and whenever a woman in the maintenance world got pregnant, there was just certain things that she was automatically restricted from doing. And it was just to protect her and protect the child. And it wasn't necessarily to prevent her from having opportunities or hold her back or anything like that. It wasn't special treatment per se. It was just to protect her and the child because the family is important to the military. And I feel like that's always been the case, but the application, I think, sometimes gets skewed or misunderstood for that. So I believe all three of you have children. Can you all talk about a little bit with me what it was like having children in the military and what you think about that? - [Paddock] So for me, I had both of my kids before the most recent changes to the maternity policy that Secretary James had implemented. So I had the, what people knew for such a long time. It was six weeks for the mom, one week for the husband. And I had to fight to get anything more than that. I used all my leave and then after that, that put me in a position where if my child got sick or if anything else came up, if I got sick, we were kind of in a spot. And I, even in the medical career field, I was often told by my male supervisor, "Well can your husband, can take care of that." My kid had to go home early from school or had a fever and they just look at me and say, "Your husband can take care of that." And absolutely my husband can help out, sometimes kids want their mom-- - [Interviewee] I mean sometimes the husband's supervisor is saying the same thing to the husband. - [Paddock] Sure, yeah. - [Interviewee] So who's supposed to make this determination and it really falls on the members who sit there and figure it out. And sometimes you're just between a rock and a hard place on these things. And it's like, what are you supposed to do? - [Interviewee] Yeah, I'm really grateful for the new maternity policy though. And the details that they really thought about in writing that policy, that they look at sharing time between mom and dad. And that it isn't just static that mom gets the time and dad has to get back to work. 'Cause I know that the previous policy was written that they have a year to take paternity leave. So there were often security forces members that were told, when your wife has a child, you will have time right now, we don't have the staffing to support that. At some point in this year, we'll give you that week of paternity leave. And that's kind of frustrating because the intent, and I think with the new policy, they really tried to focus on the intent of that beginning newborn time of parents establishing a bond with their children and not just, we'll give you a week

off when it's convenient, right? - [Interviewee] One thing I think is worth mentioning too, is when we talk about families and the structure and we talk about women equality, I think of the LGBT community and how whoever is part of that family and how it's formed, and how it's structured, that there's still ways to go, but that this is part of the time to discuss that and how there's been some milestones met for the community. And that there's still obviously more to be done. - [Samantha] Now, you all brought up some excellent points here. And I think about my mentality growing up. So I'm 36 years old and when I was a kid, these types of issues weren't really things that I really thought too much about, I'm like, "Oh, we have the right to vote. "Oh, we got equal opportunities all the time." But now as an adult, a lot of these different ideas and the subtleties of our culture and our lives have been highlighted, with the Me Too Movement like you brought up earlier, human trafficking, the glass ceilings that women encounter all the time. Still struggling to get a female president (laughing). And it's interesting how just growing up and maturing how your viewpoint can change. If you had asked me as a 16 year old, "Do you feel like you have the same opportunities "as all the males in your life?" I would have straight up said, "Yes," with no hesitation. It all comes down to awareness, and that's why I think it's kind of important to have these days to highlight women, like a women's heritage month. Sometimes you like, looking back on Air Force history. And when we do like, just learning about how the Air Force was formed, it kind of blows my mind to think that there were women in the Air Force back in 1947 when it was established and what life was like for those women. And especially as a veteran, when even today, when people think of a veteran, they don't often think of a woman, but gosh, I couldn't even imagine back in the '50s and '60s to be a female veteran and what their experience was. I'm grateful that there are women's veterans groups now. San Antonio Women's Veterans is a group that I'm a part of. And it's really nice to get together with other women. And yeah, we've all had the same experience. - [Interviewee] Oh yeah, I mean, I got a lot of stories, but one of the things you brought up that reminded me. So I remember one time it was I believe Veterans Day, is a day where they give out all the free food. You can go to a restaurant and they'll either give you a free meal or a discount or whatever. And I remember we're going through the line and they're were checking people as they were going through to see who needs a free meal and he was paying or what not. And he was asked, "Are you a veteran?" And he said, "Yes." So happily, he goes on through. And I'm expecting to get asked too 'cause I'm there and completely looked over, wasn't even spoken to, wasn't addressed. And I had to basically tell this guy, "I'm a veteran, give me my free meal." (Laughing) - [Interviewee] Yeah, I had the same thing happened to me. I sat down at a table with my husband and some of our friends. And I was the only female, me, and I had my kids with me. And they came and they said, "Well, this is Veteran's Day. "So we've got this special menu." And they handed out a special menu to both of our friends and then one to my husband and they gave me a regular menu. - [Interviewee] What is this? - [Interviewee] I was so confused you didn't even ask. - [Interviewee] Yeah. - [Samantha] And it's just like, these assumptions are what I feel why awareness is so important. I feel like, through no fault of men of their own, a lot of times they don't quite see what the struggle is like for people on the other side. A lot of them do. I'm not at all saying that they're wrong or blind (laughing). But the

importance of awareness is just for these instances. To help raise awareness and to help people in general, just understand and know, "Hey, a veteran, isn't just a male white guy." - [Interviewee] Well, I just think of it, Air Force base had some of their senior, grassroots sergeant, superintendents. They weren't all senior master sergeants, but they were all superintendents on the wing staff. And so they're invited and there was male and female representation. And they went along the lines of discussing, how they feel, what their part is with this day and women's equality in general. And so I think it's so important when we have discussions that are to advocate or put awareness about a certain group to have others of a different group also represented because we are all a part of the same human race. And I need the males to also believe in equality as much as I want the women to believe in equality so that we can find ways to partner and bring about the change that we want to see. And so I just think, just by them, even making sure that they invited all of the superintendents, one of them was a female and I mean, one of them was a male and vice for. It brought that discussion for him to include his perspective and how, him to include his family and how he has daughters and how he wants them to be thinking about how they are equal and that they can achieve as much as their brother or anybody else that they see. So that was just a plus that I thought was good in a recent discussion that I heard. - [Samantha] What do you think Sergeant Moleno? - [Elsbeth] No, I think that's really awesome to represent that whole, 'cause we're all part of a pie, right? A whole piece of pie. And we represent all the different people and bring that awareness to everyone that's part of our whole. That's how we bring that change. - [Samantha] Well, Gladiators that wraps up this discussion about Women's Equality Day and some of the perspectives and challenges and issues that women in the military may or may not, I would hope would relate with us on, on some of these topics. So thank you very much for your time and thank you for what you do and have a fantastic day. (Bright upbeat music)