

Ep. 18: How to commission in the 960th CW

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Welcome to another episode of the "Sword and Shield." This is Chief Master Sergeant Chris Howard, Superintendent of the 960th COG. Today we're lucky to have two guests. One with us through electronic means. You know it's I don't know, zapped in and don't mind introducing yourself, sir? - Yeah, this is Captain Nick Nava. I'm the 960th Cyberspace Wing non-EAD ACP Program Manager. I have been with the 426th for about two years and I am a traditional reservist and live in Albuquerque, New Mexico. - Well, welcome sir. We also have? - I'm Second Lieutenant Adrienne Anderson from the 426 NWS, and I am serving as the alternate program manager for the 960th Cyberspace Wing non-EAD commissioning program. - Well, welcome to both of you. Thanks for being here. Thank you for taking the time and thank you for really working on this program. So you mentioned the program is non-EAD but most of people recall it more as DACP. Can you explain that a little bit? - Yes, sir. So when the new AF manual was pushed out in September 2019, they actually changed the program name. So we commonly we see it referred to as DAC-P but it is the non-EAD program. So when you are searching those terms online, especially through myPers, you'll see it as the non-EAD Commissioning Program. - Okay, awesome. Yeah, so we're gonna have to learn a new acronym and learn a little bit of new terminology, but the program's essentially the same, correct? Captain Nava, can you speak to a little bit about our program here at the 960th Cyberspace Wing? - Yeah. So in large part, the new program is the same. There's some small differences. I think what we know is the DACP or the Deserving Army Commission Program, I think that one was based more on a yearly board. So every year there would be a batch of prospective commissionees that would go to a board with their package and then go through the process. Our new program has the same goal of producing high-quality officers from our own wing, but it's more of an ongoing process. So there's not a drop-dead date where you have to have a package and artifacts in, in order to be considered. It's more of an ongoing thing, which I think people will find more comforting, I guess. You're not anticipating meeting (indistinct) through the process at your own pace. - Okay. So, I mean, just to clarify a little bit. Instead of going through an annual board where Hey, let's say November, we're going to do this and everybody puts the package together, meets the board and then there's selectees. Let's say we pick five of 10. This is the ongoing process is, that as jobs are open, then it's an individual competition for each one of those jobs, correct? - Yeah, I think that's a good way to put it. It's based on the member's motivation too. That one board, the board used to meet once a year. If you're motivated and the stars align, potentially you could get through the process quicker

than that. - Okay, gotcha. And I know you mentioned something about being a program for our wing. Is it limited to just our wing or can anybody out there in the reserves apply? - It's focused on our wing. What we're trying to do is we're trying to get talent that we have in our wing because there is a lot of it, but yeah, we are starting to look outside the wing and bring other people that are very, very well qualified into the 960th. - Awesome. Lieutenant Anderson, I know you've worked on a lot of the products that we're using for this program. Can you talk about some of the items that are necessary for the package? - Yes sir. So initially I would like to draw attention. We have created a CVR, a Microsoft team specifically for the non-EAD commissioning program. We've uploaded several how-to tutorials for members to go out and look at some of the products available. And I walk them through how to go through those products. But some of the initial things that you will need is the Air Force form 56, the Air Force form 24. They are very hefty documents. So spending a lot of time refining those is going to be important. Additionally, letters of recommendation from previous commanders or senior leadership is also required. One thing I try to get people to look at initially is the AFOQT. It's that qualifying test for officers, making sure you have time to study and plan in advance is going to be extremely important, especially in the environment we're in today. The tests are limited and we want to make sure people have enough time to properly prep for that. Additionally, you're going to need some of your school education completion documents, and personal letters, resumes and all of those templates can actually be found on our SharePoint site. - Awesome. Okay. You say that those are hefty documents. You're actually a graduate from the old DACP program, correct? Can you tell me a little bit of your thoughts and your feelings about that program versus the new program? - Yes, sir. I can tell you that the program we are currently in today and that we've developed for our wing is much more dynamic and it places a lot of responsibility on that enlisted member who is interested in commissioning. The previous program as Captain Nava mentioned, would be a lot of members would try to rush and complete the documents or the package, and it wouldn't be necessarily complete. It wouldn't be 100% ready for the board, but they would push it forward anyway. Now with this program, it is extremely dynamic and dependent on the member and their leadership. So you do have the time to ensure that you are pushing forward quality products and the package is 100% complete for that commander that's conducting your interview. The previous process took roughly two years to get through for those members. So initial notification you've been selected, two years until you actually graduate OTS. And that was largely due to the medical requirements, unclear guidance. So I think with this new program, we've made it extremely clear of what we need, how we're going to get through the process. And I based this off of my package, the current program and I was able to get initial selection through OTS within one year. I actually graduated OTS within the same month that I was notified the year prior. So this program, we're looking at nine to 12 months for total completion. - Okay, and you mentioned a couple of requirements there. So I think it's almost expected that you have to have all the education documentation ready to go but the medical piece. So under this new program, I have to have all the medical and all of the documents ready to go before applying to that position, correct? Versus how you were identifying some of the

nuances of the previous DACP or maybe we didn't have all that documentation ready, but in this program you absolutely have to have all the documentation ready to go upon submission, correct? - Yes sir. We actually make it a two-step process. So for your initial package, for the 960th cyber wing, whether you're within our wing or you're outside of our wing you have to get an Air Force form 422. This is the medical clearance form. You can get it from your servicing military treatment facility. So once you get that form 422, that goes in your package to show that you are basic qualified for commissioning. Once you are formally selected by a commander within the 960th Cyberspace Wing, you will move forward to getting a DB form 2808 and a 2807. And these are the actual physical and they review your medical history to ensure that you're qualified. So they do the initial 422, and that shows that you are medically cleared to participate. And then once you're formally selected, we move forward with the actual physical as required from the doctors. And that piece does take two to three months to get approved at the AFRC level. - Okay, so if I wanted to apply for a job that's opening next month, I may already be behind on that power curve if I don't already have it in the works? - Yes sir. And typically you request your Air Force form 422 through your UHN within your squadron, and they can request it from your medical treatment facility. It does take about a month turnaround because you have to understand they're operating for the UTA, the doctors on hand. Now, if you are AGR, you do have somewhat of an advantage because you can leverage the active duty clinic to provide that 422 for you. - Okay. Some great points. Awesome. So Captain Nava, if I was to look for a job, if I wanted to be one of those non-EAD program participants, where would I find these particular jobs that are available for this program? - The official location, for open jobs is RMDS. My understanding is that's not always totally accurate and there may be openings that aren't actually on there. So in order to find jobs, that's where a prospective member would leverage their squadron leadership to talk to other commanders and see what's available. So that's part of why it's so important that a prospective member early on in the process talks to their squadron leadership and gets their support so that they can help them through that part of the process. - If I'm wanting to do this, I let my commander know or let my superintendent know and say, this is a program I want to go down and then they can help us direct us to the products that Lieutenant Anderson had already discussed, and then would help us navigate that within the wing and what those jobs are located as well as maybe some of those jobs that may not be accurately depicted in RMDS. - Right, right, and the wing does have other products that they track also. So that's part of whether I would come in, as members going through this process and talking to their leadership, that's where I would help is to help find that information that the member can find a prospective unit that they can go to. - Gotcha. And sir, you commissioned in a different format than Lieutenant Anderson. Can you give me your perspective of how there's a difference between the way you commissioned to this and what some of the benefits of either one are, by chance. - Sure. Yeah, I've actually talked to a number of people about this. For those that don't know, there's three main ways that you can commission in the Air Force, so you can do ROTC, which is what I did. You can go to the Air Force Academy, which is what some people do. And then you can also go through officer training school, which is for folks that are not

currently in the military or are enlisted in the military and want to become an officer. Like I said, I did ROTC. So that consists of going to college and basically doing ROTC. It's like a second job is what I found it. So ROTC, I'd go to class and do my college basically. And then also there were certain requirements that I had to do every week. I had to get up twice a week and go to PT. I had military classes that I had to go to. We have what's called leadership laboratory where we go and then we have a cadet-led wing, which is pretty cool. I did drill team, there's extracurriculars. So it's cool because, I got to go to college, the four year thing, get that quote unquote "college experience". But I also got my military training while I was doing it. And while I think that's useful to get that perspective of going to school and gaining that breadth of knowledge, I also think that doing the commissioning this way having someone that's in the military and is skilled and of high character, the high-speed person, I think that's huge. And honestly, from talking to people, I think that people have a different respect for officers that have been enlisted, because they've been there, they know what the enlisted folks are dealing with. They can help them and deal with those things properly. - Right. That's some great points. I appreciate you sharing your story. So with this program different than ROTC, being a program that you were a part of, what are some of the nuances that a new non-EAD program participant would actually have to look at and be prepared for that may be a little bit different than these other programs? - Sure. So I think with ROTC, I think one of the benefits there is that you get to ease into the military. Just in general. I think in a lot of ways I was not. I mean, you're never going to be prepared to be an officer in the US military 'cause that's a, it's an interesting profession and it's quite an experience. There's a lot of responsibility. I love being an officer, but I think you're never going to be totally prepared for it doing it the way that I did. I think that being an enlisted member in the military you have a taste of, you know what you're probably going to see and probably have to do. So I think that's definitely a benefit of doing it this way. I think being in our wing for about two years, I've seen a lot of amazing, talented, smart, very qualified in my opinion, airman, enlisted airman that I think would be great officer candidates and I'm happy that we have this program and this process to give those folks a chance to step up if they want to, and really make the Air Force a better place by lending their leadership and their talents. And so I think it's awesome. Great sir. - Lieutenant Anderson, being a graduate of a program like this, can you explain some of the nuances of the changes, some of the things that you've had to deal with transitioning from being part of the elite enlisted corps that we have here at the wing, and now being part of the elite officer corps that we have here in the wing. - Yes sir, I have to agree with you. We have a complete elite enlisted force. Honestly, I came over from active duty in 2016 and I joined the AGR program with the 854, so that was my first real experience in the Reserve. And I was completely shocked about how the Reserve Force conducts business essentially. They are the backbone for active duty. They serve as the continuity and I met so many qualified enlisted individuals who had a multitude of degrees, so much experience in their civilian job that they would bring back to the 854 COS. So I felt extremely excited and motivated to commission and learn how to make a difference with our wing, and I saw the opportunity in 2018 for the commissioning board. And at that time the (indistinct) and I immediately briefed it that I thought this would be

a really great opportunity to continue to grow in the wing. And some of the nuances being, I was an E6 before I transitioned over to being a second lieutenant. And there is some definite growing pains that you experience. And I think that is with any transition in life or any transition in the military. I am extremely thankful and I had a friend ask me just yesterday, how do you feel about this opportunity? And anybody I brief, I tell them if it's something you saw for your life five years ago or two years ago or a month ago, you know there's nothing holding you back from at least trying and putting in a package because the minute you commission and you're walking across the parade field, you're just so elated and it is worth all the hard work, the process for the package, the frustration you're going to feel doing the same form 12 times, so it is all worth it. You're going to feel frustrated through the process. There are things that are going to seem a little bit confusing when working through it, but Captain Nava and I, and all of the leadership here are really going to assist you through this process and you're going to grow and develop as a leader in the Air Force, as an airman professionally and personally. So I feel extremely lucky that I was able to grow as an E4, E5, E6, in the Reserve and then transfer over to being a lieutenant and thankfully transitioning the units is also great. So I was enlisted in the 854, but I was picked up by the 426 NWS to commission. And I think that really helps get a different perspective because you're not commissioning in the same unit. You're not around the same people. So you have a little bit more flexibility with developing yourself as a leader. - Gotcha. That was some good points there. And the piece that I would want to pick out is the eligibility standards, 'cause I know that there's some things that we don't necessarily see that may be a barrier. So if we know that now, how do we work around that? So do you know what those eligibility standards might be? - Yes sir. That is a great point. And I feel that is an initial gate for some individuals and they automatically get pushed back because they are unsure if there's a waiver for that requirement or maybe they exceed the waiver. So a few things I do want to address is initially I think everyone talks about it is age, so - 'Cause I'm really old. I think I'm excluded. So they redid the Air Force manual. It is now 362032 published 27 September 2019. So it is very fresh. And with this, they do address age. So the initial age cutoff is 40 by the graduation of OTS. Now this is on my PRS, it's in the Air Force manual but one thing want to address is adjusted age. It's like dog years. So with adjusted age, if you have served in any other branch of the military, any other status in the military, it essentially calculates how much good time you have into your age. So for example, if you are 40 real age, but you had completed four years active duty in the Navy, it would essentially minus that from your real age. So in the eyes of the Air Force, you are 36. I just did public MAST, that's really important. - My mind's blown. - It's recorded. I'm like 40 something, let's just say 42 for argument's sake, but I've got 12 years of active duty. It's Air Force, but that counts against me in that case, correct, 'cause it was Air Force? - No sir. So it can even be the same service. It's just looking at the different status that you were in. So this is all in the Air Force manual. You can check it out. So initial age, the second that a lot of people consider is possibly their degree. Maybe it's not in the right career field. So with the different types of officers that we have, the degree is not necessarily considerable when looking at their appointment into either a 17 or a 14. - Some experience might come into play for that, correct? - Right, yes sir. They do

consider your experience as maybe a three Delta a one Bravo, a one and four one and oh, so that helps. Additionally with the eligibility factors they are considering your moral character. How are you as an individual? How are you as an airman, a conscientious objector, those are all parts of the application process that you have to acknowledge moving forward. And then I think one other thing that we look at often is the AFOQT scores. So typically there is a minimum for just being appointed in the officer. - Corps. - Officer Corps, right? And so, if you take the AFOQT the first time and you do not meet the minimums, which does happen to individuals because there's a lot of different life factors, there is guidance on when you can take that test again. You can take it up to three times with a waiver. - Yeah. That was the next question I had for you is how many times can I take it? Can I take it unlimited? But no, three. - Right, right. - That's the magic number. - Yes sir, you can take it a second time without a waiver. You have to wait roughly six months and work with the education office on that. So, sometimes it's a setback. People get frustrated, but I take all of that as a learning point and something to grow from. - Awesome. - Yes, sir. - Some great points. I do feel like it was pointing at me with all those different questions about moral character and then feasibility and all that stuff. (Laughter) But I'll let that one go. Captain Nava, did you have anything to add about some of those requirements or any other things that you see as barriers that people are counting as a barrier that might not truly be a barrier? - No, nothing that I can really think of. I think Lieutenant Anderson did a really good job of talking to those things. There are some disqualifying factors. I mean, I think some of those are pretty obvious, in general, questionable moral character, involvement with narcotics or illegal drugs, under restraint opposed by civil or criminal court, if you've been disenrolled from an officer training program before, discharged with rank other than honorable. I mean, those are some pretty obvious things, but I think, as I'm talking to people, I think the people that are interested in going down this path, I think they're in general probably going to be qualified. - Great points. So I think we've really hammered this out. There's so many questions that come up and there's so many different nuances, but it really comes down to looking for the AFI, looking at the program. Captain Nava, do you have any closing points that you might want to make with the program as we finish up today? - Yeah, I just wanted to reiterate about the program SharePoint page. I think Lieutenant Anderson mentioned it at the beginning. If you go to the 960 Cyber Wing homepage on the left there, there's a little link for it, says commissioning program. If you go to that link, there's a lot of information and that's where I direct people to go to first if they have any questions or if they're interested in going down this path. Lieutenant Anderson has done an outstanding job of setting that up and there's actually even template packets. So if you're going through the process and you're trying to fill out your packet, there is a packet that Lieutenant Anderson put on there that has been successful in going through the program. There's guidance, there's graphics that walk through the process. Lieutenant Anderson's even done some videos walking through the process. So there is a lot of great information and I would highly encourage any prospective members and also squadron leadership that may have members in their squadron that are going through this process. I would highly encourage really everybody to go through that so they're aware of it. - Awesome, sir.

Lieutenant Anderson, do you have anything to add? - Yes, sir. - I think Captain Nava did an excellent job really wrapping up the program. The other piece I just wanted to include was we do have a 960th Cyber Wing commissioning program manager org box on Outlook that you can reach out, to send us an email, let us know if there's anything that you need help with, assistance, any clarification on questions and definitely leverage your squadron leadership. And if we can assist you in any way, just let us know. - Awesome. And thank you to both of you guys. The energy, the effort, the time that both of you have taken to take this program to the next step is phenomenal. As much as I don't want to lose my enlisted members to the officer corps, 'cause I want to keep that good solid leadership, that experience in place. I think this is a great program. I think it's an opportunity for some unique and talented airmen to move into the officer corps. So on behalf of them, I want to tell both of you, thank you. You guys are the ones that are building this program. So they have an opportunity. Lieutenant Anderson being a graduate from it, you understand the importance of it. Captain Nava, being an officer and seeing that talent and seeing the importance in that means a lot to the enlisted corps. So thank you to both of you for your energy, thank you to both of you for your effort. And thank you for your commitment to your airmen. This definitely is something that they're going to enjoy, and for those that do get selected will be grateful for. So thank you on behalf of them. For me to close out, I want to once again thank everybody out there. All of you gladiators that commit your time to the 960th Cyber Wing, to the Reserves and to your country on behalf of a fellow citizen, I'm grateful for your time, your effort, and the fact that you're willing to raise your hand and defend your country and defend your fellow citizens. So gladiators, best of luck to you and have a great day.
(Energetic music)