

Ep. 7: The O.G. Commander

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Welcome to "Sword and Shield" podcast. This is episode seven and I'm Colonel Rick Erredge. - And I'm Chief Chris Howard. - With us today, we have- - Colonel Lori Jones. - We're super excited to have you here, ma'am. Thanks for joining us. - I am excited to be here. - We just wanna give you an opportunity to kinda have some thoughts on your transition and as your time here as a wing commander and the group prior to that. So are there any... What are you kinda thinking about now as we head through this transition? - Well, I'm thinking about two different things. One, personally, I'm thinking about me, personally, and reflecting on my personal experience, and then I'm also thinking about the organization. Personally, this is the last time I'll probably ever be commander in my career, and so that's very bittersweet for me. I think for those of you that are listening that have had that privilege to be a commander, it's an awesome responsibility, there's a lot of weight and burden that comes with that, but it also brings you great pleasure and joy. And so it's very bittersweet for me to kinda walk away from this assignment with that realization that this will be probably the last time that I'm gonna be able to wear that commander pin on my chest, and so it's been fantastic. It's been an awesome experience to be able to be the first wing commander of the Cyberspace Wing and Air Force Reserve Command, so that's been awesome, and I will always be able to say I was the first, and so that's pretty cool. I'm also super excited. When you leave an assignment, you always talk about wanting to leave things better than you found it, and I remember when I first came here, when we were still the Cyber Operations Group, and I met with all of the commanders and the superintendents as part of one of our leadership summits, and I talked about I'm gonna work really hard to help us improve the organization and mature the organization. While that's a journey and a path that we're on, and we're certainly not nowhere near the end of that path, I really am proud of the work that we have all done in maturing the organization, and it is so much better today than it was a couple years ago. I'm so proud of that work, not just for me, but for you guys that are sitting here with me today and everybody out there listening, we all should be very proud of the work we've done over the last couple of years to mature the organization. - Yeah, I agree. I remember talking to Colonel Terry years ago when he was talking about this concept of a Cyberspace Wing and that it really, it brings some life into my career about, hey, there's an opportunity, for a cyber dude or dudette, to have an opportunity to lead an organization at the wing level. - Hey, ma'am, and that kind of leads me to a question. You were able to kinda see the maturity of going from comm to cyber, from the unit level to the group, and through the transition and the growth of the wing. Is there anything that you can kinda share about that experience? - There are so many things

I can share about that experience. I'll try to keep it concise since this is a short podcast, right? - How about a funny story? Just something- - A funny story. There's a lot of sad stories and probably a lot of yelling and stuff that went along with the experience, but I did have the opportunity. I was in the what's now the 50th Network Warfare Squadron, which was at the time we were the 710th Information Operations Flight when we actually moved under the group, when the group very first stood up, and then left and came back as part of the group when it was still the group, then we had kind of reorganized with all of the cyber units under the group, and then matriculated into the wing. And I think despite the challenges of geography, I think one of the things that I've noticed is, particularly in the last 12 months, our ability to come together as an entire organization. As a part of the 710th, I think we often felt we were out on an island. I recognize a lot of units probably still feel that to a certain extent, but the way we are communicating better, overcoming the tyranny of distance by doing things like this, and having these podcasts, and so many opportunities to come together as a unit. We sat on a call yesterday about strategic planning, had folks from all over the wing doing that. We just didn't do things like that when we were first starting out as an organization, and so I'm getting folks in that are energized, and have that initiative, and wanna bring everybody together. Synergy is real, and so getting people together and creating those synergies and great ideas, I think the power of that is phenomenal. We're starting to see a lot of momentum around those synergies that we just didn't have earlier on when we were just kinda a fledgling group. - Right, I mean, yeah. I think that we've made some great inroads just in the past year and a half that I've been with the wing. I'm definitely excited about where we've come from, right? And where we're headed. - I think we're really lucky to have you on the journey because you grew up, kinda what I tell people, she grew up in the wing, right? As that unit, and then through the group processes, you went away and then came back for the wing, and so you've seen this maturity over time. And so you kind of understand mission sets and where we're trying to go. Where do you feel like we should go in the future? What kind of things would you tell, if somebody were listening to this five years from now, what kind of things would we be doing as a wing? - Right, as you were kinda formulating that question, I wrote down a note. I think one of the real challenges, for our organization in particular, is not only kinda coming together as an organization, but our operational mission is still evolving. And so whereas if you're involved in a flying unit or whatever, those kinds of things, I think in my mind at least, have kind of been the same over time, and we are still literally, to use a very overused euphemism, we're still flying the plane as we're building it kinda thing. So we're still trying to figure out from a mission perspective where we fit in the overall cyber domain. I think where we're going and where we need to focus is this whole idea that General Hawk's been promoting and putting into practice, is that informational warfare concept, and really organizing and coalescing around what information warfare is, what does that look like, what effects can we produce, and really look at the kind of melding between cyber intel and those other missionaries to create the effects from informational warfare. So my crystal ball tells me in the next 12 to 24 months, there's gonna be a lot of discussion about how we can organize around trying to improve that concept, what that really looks like in an organization, and I'm hoping

to see the 960th really lead the way as far as the Air Force Reserves is concerned in that respect. I think you guys have the talent, you have the knowledge, and you have the leadership here that you're gonna lead the way in terms of those changes to come in the Air Force Reserves. - Certainly, it's an exciting time being part of standing up the first wing and the only cyber wing in AFRC, but going forward, I think that excitement is still there and it's gonna take all sorts of different types of people for us to realize that. - Right, and as we keep on changing, it brings me into another question is, is there any kind of advice that you could give to our enlisted corps specifically how to meet that change, adapt to that change, and be ready for the next step? - I think, first and foremost, I would say whether you're enlisted, officer corps, be engaged and stay engaged, and be informed about what's going on. I think that's a challenge, particularly for those of us that are traditional reservist, to stay engaged in what's going on. There's so much that changes in a 30-day cycle. We need to; you stay right up on what's going on with cyber information warfare, intel, all those kinds of things. Do your homework. Keep up with whether it's a strategic document, or a news article that comes out, or a Facebook interview with cyber leaders or information warfare leaders. I think that the more you can stay up as part of your personal professional development and what's going on within the cyber information warfare realm, the better poised you're gonna be able to be to provide valuable input, regardless of whether you're a combat comm dude or you worked on the CSCS, a weapon system or whatever. If you understand the big picture, you're gonna understand where you fit in that bigger picture and where the DoD and the air force is trying to go with respect to cyber, and you can provide that input in terms of where you personally fit into that perspective. I think professional development on the personal side is something that I think is really important, and so my advice for any airmen is make sure you're doing your professional development pieces, the pieces that you can control. I know that was one of the subjects of an earlier podcast that you guys did, and so I think if you haven't listened to that podcast, I'll put a plug in to go back and listen to episode three that talks about some professional development for enlisted force because I think you guys had a really good conversation about what's important and how that can help an airmen in their career in terms of their professional development, and PME, and those types of things. - Yes, ma'am. I appreciate the plug. I know that you spend some time- - You didn't pay me for that, so, but that's a freebie for you, Chief. - I appreciate it. If I can, I did have another question. Being a first ever commander of a cyber wing, being a transitional leader, what kind of advice can you give to our budding leadership out there, enlisted and officer? - I think any opportunity that you have to take the initiative to be in charge of something, whether it's being in charge of people, being in charge of a project, networking with folks outside of your organization, that's gonna help you in the long run. Again, I think back to examples from this week, we're doing all this strategic planning, and we have the three different goal areas, and it's a great opportunity for someone that either feels like they have talents that aren't being utilized. That would be a great opportunity. There's leadership opportunities all around us. Wherever you look, there's a leadership opportunity, right? And so it's everywhere you look, there's an opportunity to get involved and to do something, and then that's going to have kind

of a waterfall effect. You do it, take the initiative, do a good job, you're gonna get recognized by your organization's leadership, and the next time another opportunity comes around, then your name's going to be stuck in that commander's head about, hey, so-and-so, they really stepped out and did a good job on X, and so let's... It kind of is a situation that builds upon itself. And so I think taking advantage of those opportunities will help make a name for yourself but also give you valuable experience. - Right, that experience definitely, the little things that we miss sometimes even from a small piece, like when... Talk about an airman taking on the Snacko job, right? Everybody's like, "Nobody wants to be the Snacko." It's the worst job ever. It's nobody likes you, you never got the right stuff, and it's always empty, but it's understanding the supply chain, understanding the customer demands, and stuff like that. So it's those little things that do add up, I guess. - I can't emphasize enough how you never know what you're gonna gain from something until you do it, right? I tell folks in my career, one of the hardest jobs that I ever had, and y'all are probably gonna laugh, I was a second lieutenant, first lieutenant. I worked in protocol at Osan, in the 51st Fighter Wing at Osan, and so one of the hardest jobs, still to this day. I've been a wing commander, you know? One of the hardest jobs I ever had was working protocol. But hated it the whole time I did it, right, because it was so hard, I never got a day off, but I learned so much. Again, kinda that whole looking in the rear view mirror perspective. I learned so much by being so close to senior leaders across PACAF and across the DoD and the Air Force, and learned, you know? You watch and learn, you work your butt off, and get very little recognition sometimes, but, at the end of the day, that particular experience, I think, really set me up in terms of learning a work ethic, learning how the big picture operates, and all of those kinds of things that you would never have thought in a million years, if you're like, "Protocol? What possibly could I learn from working in protocol?" And so, sure, I learned where to put the flag and all of those kinds of things, but that was very minimal compared to what I learned in the bigger picture, and being able to be around senior leaders, and understanding how things operate, what work ethic is about, and all those types of things. You never know when you're gonna stumble across those opportunities, so take advantage. - Yeah, I agree. I've had several examples as I think about it. Myself, I came across John Goldfein at one point. We were both deployed and he was the AFCENT forward commander, and I was working in Kuwait at KCIA, and so we deal with all the DV stuff. So in my six months there, I probably had eight hours of one-on-one time with General Goldfein as he waited in the DV room, drinking Coke, watching TV, waiting for people to arrive from the States that he would pick up in his, and just for me trying to find a way to engage him. And I didn't really didn't know who he was, and, obviously, he didn't know who I was, helped me learn just how to deal interpersonal with somebody at that level. And I dreaded it every time I was on duty that when I saw the schedule, who's coming in, and I knew he would be there, it was really hard. Well, I really appreciate you, and I feel like I always know where I stand with you. From a communication point, you're really good with that. How did you get to that point of being able to, just be able to articulate from a feedback perspective with people? Was it natural to you or was it something you had to kinda work through and grow into? - I think a little bit of both. I think maturing as a human being, it's taught me

that transparency is important in life, not only while you're in your job, but at home too, probably, making sure you're trying to communicate. Now, I will tell you, I'm probably not the best communicator. None of us are probably perfect in that respect, but making sure people understand where you're coming from, being honest with folks on where they stand with you and where you stand with them, whether or not you feel like they met the target if you ask them to do something or didn't. I think that's very important because I think it sets you up for making sure there's no miscommunications or misunderstandings down the road. I think that experience has taught me that. If I'm upfront and honest, despite how difficult that is to look somebody in the eye and tell 'em, "Hey, you didn't quite meet my expectations on something," and I think there's some art and experience in kind of how that comes across and how you say that to somebody, that I've learned over the years there's probably better ways to say that than others. And I find as a colonel with 27 years in the Air Force, I'm a little bit better at providing that constructive feedback than I was maybe as a second lieutenant. And so from that perspective, there's definitely ways to, again, going back to your own personal professional development, learning how to give that feedback is important, but from a perspective of how it's received, but also from the perspective of making sure we're all on the same page and we all know where we stand with each other and where we're going, and I think that helps with definitely minimizing confusion and misunderstandings in the long run. - And I think that's a great point, ma'am, right? The maturing of your leadership capability. I know I was horrible, especially when talking about explaining the missed opportunities or explaining where someone maybe has missed that expectation. I think I delivered it like a hammer more than once, (laughing) and it was not very taken well. - I would say that's probably the tendency for all of us to wanna, to kinda lead with the heavy hand. And I think also it's important for, as I've matured over the years, to understand you gotta consider the individual as well. And so some people take feedback different than others, and so some people you may be able to be a little bit more direct with than other people, and you might maybe need to massage your message also based on who your audience is. And so that was, that's a little plug for emotional intelligence for folks. If you ever, again, your personal professional development, if you wanna read up on emotional intelligence, I think that helped me tremendously a few years ago. I did some work with somebody on emotional intelligence, and the benefits that I derived from that have been awesome. So understanding your audience and tailoring your message based on that audience, on that individual and how they're going to perceive that, I think is very beneficial in terms of making sure you tailor your message to somebody that maybe needs to hear the message differently, maybe a little less direct than others. - Yeah, I think that's a good tie-in, too, with a different statement that you made when we talked about professional development and PME. We talk about how to interact with individuals and like, "I'm not gonna learn that." It's like math in high school, right? I'm never gonna use this. But you take that piece, and then you add the piece that you just explained to us with emotional intelligence, and we start putting all those pieces together. I think that as a leader, we owe it to our airmen, and we owe it to ourselves to make that effort, to really gather those pieces and put them together so that we can interact holistically with our airmen so

we get the best kind of output based on our expectations and what that airman needs. - And I think it's important to understand that all of us can learn from others. And so I learn from you guys, right? I learn from anybody. Just because I'm a colonel doesn't mean I can't learn something from a senior airman or a staff sergeant. And so being open to that concept that you are always ready and able to learn from someone, whether they're a staff sergeant, the cashier at the convenience store or whatever. Somebody can teach anybody anything. And so I think that's an important thing as individuals, for us to look out for, is that always be ready to learn 'cause you never know when that, where that lesson is going to come. - Right, yeah, learning is a continuum, right? It's non-stop. As soon as you stop, you're pretty much dead in the water. I think that's personal, and it's a very good point, ma'am. Learning from each other, knowing that mentorship isn't just from the top down, it's very just omnidirectional. - Omnidirectional is a great way to put it. Big word. - Yeah. - A comm word. I had to bring something that's most in comm in there, you know? Well, I gotta share with you what I've, as I was reflecting about what are we gonna talk about, what's important to pass on in this podcast, it came across me. I started thinking about, "What question do I get asked about you most?" Like, as a vice, I feel like I try to be there and listen to people. They always wanna bounce something off me. They wanna figure out, "Is this something I should take to her? How's it gonna be received?" And I try to give some advice and mentor. You may be shocked, but one of the questions I get asked most is, it always starts with, "I know she's busy," and everybody kinda, I won't say everybody, but some people know your high speed civilian job, and this job, being a wing commander, it takes a lot of time. And so we try to, I try to put it in a position, is this something that she needs make a decision on? And if it is, then we find time, and you're always willing to take the time to listen and to make that decision. We try to put that in front of you in the best way possible. But how do you, and I'm not sure balance is the right word, but because through your life you're never always balanced, so your civilian job, your role as a reservist, and then as a family member as well. So any thoughts there about how you've been able to, or things that you've learned about managing kinda the what we used to call the three-legged stool as a reservist? - I have so many thoughts on that. I'm still trying to perfect that balance. I think that's always something that is difficult, is that, you know, I call it the work-life balance. (laughing) And I think a lot of it, though, depends on your particular situation. I think it ebbs and flows, for example, between your personal life and work life. I think there'll be times when you, maybe you need to give a little more on the personal side, perhaps relationship issues require you to give a little bit more on that side, or you have a baby, or you decided that it's time to go to school, and so you need to focus on that. But there will definitely, if you wanna progress in your career, there's times where you've gotta put your career in that kind of driver's seat, right? It's difficult for me. Like you said, I have two very demanding jobs, and so it's just every day, it's just you gotta prioritize and figure it out. It's just it's hard. I'm not gonna lie. It's not easy, it's hard, and what that looks like is different for everybody. I'm fortunate enough to be in a situation in my civilian job where I have a lot of freedom, so sometimes I'm doing, literally doing both jobs during the day. My civilian job allows me the freedom to do that. I don't necessarily go home at five o'clock and turn off the wheels or whatever, but you

have to make sure you afford yourself the opportunity to do that. I know early on, I've figured out I'm a person who needs to turn the light switch out. Some people aren't like that. I tell folks this story of on my civilian job, my previous boss from a few years ago, she was real, you know, it made her more comfortable to be always on, and so she had this expectation where she would get up in the middle of the night, and she would stop by her laptop and check her email when she got up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom. It was a very light bulb moment for me because I am not that person. Granted there's emergencies that come through and things like that, but for me, I need that shutdown time, and so when I go home, I wanna be at home. Now, granted, we've talked a lot when we've been at home, right? So there's emergencies that come up, and those are kinda the exceptions to the rule, but what works for me, I've found, is get my work done, do my work, whatever work that is, and I need to stop and get away from work in order to recharge my battery for the next day, or the next month or whatever that is. And so encourage folks to take time off. I just did that last week, took time off. Did I have to do some things while I was on vacation? Sure. But taking that time off and recharging my batteries is very important for me to come back this week and attack it. So I think that's a real important balance for everybody, but also something that's very individualized. - Good point, yeah. That resiliency piece in leadership is very key in knowing- - Is very key. - Knowing what that balance is and knowing when to unplug. - And it's different for everybody. What works for me isn't going to work for Chief Howard, is not gonna work for Colonel Erredge, and so it's just very different for each person. That's also something I think you have to work with your supervisors about, to learn that give and take between each of those two individuals, like what works for my supervisor and understand that as well because I think that's real important in the supervisor/supervisee relationship, understanding how that person works and those kinds of things. - Yeah, it's a really great message 'cause I think... And then you throw on top of what's going on in the world that's influencing all these things too. Some people are having a hard time, obviously, right now at different times, and we're trying to reach them all, so that's a great message, them kind of matters. So I think we're approaching the end of the podcast. We're gonna leave you an opportunity to wrap it up. And I just want to say thanks, good luck, and you'll always be number one. - (laughing) I'll always feel like I'm number one, at least in my own mind. - You can do what John Goldfein does, where he calls himself Chief Staff Number 21. You can always be- - Number one. - CW Number One. - That's right. That's right. That'll be on my tattoo when I get my tattoo, my Cyberspace Wing Tattoo. I'll have a little number one next to it. - Samantha wants that for all the social media when you get that, so make sure to send us a picture. - All right, I'm on it. As Chief Bischoff knows, I am in the throes of thinking about covering up a tattoo that I have, and so that's on the list of possibilities. - Nice. - So you actually may get one of those here someday soon. Thanks, first of all, for inviting me to be part of this podcast. It allows me the opportunity to thank everyone else that's listening. So this has been the privilege of my career, to be a wing commander. I would have never have thought 27 years ago Second Lieutenant Jones would have ever been a wing commander. And so I've referred to myself several times in different forms as the accidental wing commander, right? I feel like, in certain respects, I backed up into

this, but I hope you guys feel like I did you justice in terms of leading this wing. It's been a privilege and an honor, and I'm so excited the direction that you all are heading, and I can't wait to buy some popcorn and a hot dog and sit in the cheap seats and watch where you guys are heading next because I think the world better be ready 'cause there's great things in store for the 960th Cyberspace Wing, and I can't wait to see that. So thanks to everybody out there for all your hard work and your dedication and professionalism in the face of all the challenges that we faced the last few years. Your work and your talent is extraordinary. I'll miss you guys. I will miss all of you. I look forward to hopefully our paths crossing in the future, so thank you very much. (upbeat music)