

## Ep. 8.2: Col. Thaddeus Janicki

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Right, welcome to another episode of the Sword and Shield. I am Chief Christopher Howard, the Superintendent of the 960th Cyberspace Operations Group. And today with me via phone I have, - Colonel Thaddeus Janicki, 860th Cyberspace Operations Group Commander. - Awesome, Sir. Thank you for taking the time to talk to us today. Congratulations on your selection to be in the 860th Cargo Commander. I was wondering if you could kind of give us an idea of how you grew up in the Air Force, maybe some examples of your assignments and some of that experience that you're bringing to the table, Sir? - Yeah, first Chief, thanks for having me on it's truly a pleasure to be part of your podcast and have this opportunity to speak with the listeners. My background is, so I was a college baseball player back a long time ago and at that time I sort of took more interest in the athletics than I did the academics. And I suffered a little bit on the academic side. And I knew I needed a change in my life. So I enlisted in the Air Force. Almost got picked up by the Army almost by the Marines but ultimately decided on the Air Force. And can't say that I could've made a better decision. So I did six years enlisted, which I really believe the whole prior enlisted officer experience is such a huge part of being a successful leader. Having the experience of being on the enlisted call truly has shaped a lot of my thoughts and ideas of what I am as an officer. So I did four years active duty enlisted. I swapped over to the reserves because it was just a point in my life where I felt I had some other priorities. So I swapped over to the reserves enlisted and did it two more years there. And then in '99, after completing my master's degree while working, going to school, I was able to get commissioned in the U.S Air Force Reserves. And I started off in the medical call because I was in medical call when I was enlisted. So it was a logical transition but I immediately, I always, because of what I was doing on the enlisted side, I did a lot with computers. And back then in the '90s the whole computer career field was rather young and growing. So, I picked up a lot of experience there to translate it well when I went to the medical service call. I was able to do a lot of computers. I ran the hospital network and then from there, I just, it just was a logical transition into what is cyber today. On the cyber side, I worked as a lieutenant through captain at a Squadron level. I was selected to go to Air War College at the Naval Academy or at the Navy War College. Worked for General Miller as her exec. And then I started working my way into where I am now within the Wing. I've had some great experiences, I hope to capitalize on all that experience as I move forward in this position. - Awesome, Sir, now that sounds like a really interesting story. It's a very unique, you know, much like a lot of our airmen, each

person has their own pathway and yours is definitely a, one that you don't always hear, right? So we're definitely appreciative of the shout out for the enlisted call that you gave me and kind of how that shapes the way you see your leadership. Is there any advice you could give to a young buddy in an airman Janicki if he was in front of you today? - You know I think it's the same with the advice I gave today for myself, that I would give myself back then. And it's living our core values. I was fortunate I grew up with the opportunity of being a Boy Scout and as a Boy Scout and eventually make an Eagle Scout. We have our laws and those laws that were instilled in me at such a young age translate very well to what the Air Force core values are. And I would say if you follow the laws like the Boy Scouts or the Air Force core values and integrity first service before self excellence in all we do, you're gonna be very successful. And I believe if you just live that throughout your life, nothing's going to stop you. And so I would tell myself that as a young airman as I would tell it to me today as an officer. I think that those are principles that are going to make everyone successful. - Yeah, definitely I agree, Sir, right there. That value system is one of those key pieces to our culture, right? In our community and it's something that sometimes we kind of can take a pass on and definitely like the fact that we can now bring it back up on a regular basis and then kind of refocus ourselves. So, thank you, Sir, for bringing that up. And I'm not picking on your age here, I promise but as you've, you pointed it out in the beginning of the podcast, you said that you started working on computers in the '90s when it was totally new. It was something different. And now as you've grown through your career as a Comm Officer through the 17 Delta into that transition from Comm to cyber, what do you think is the biggest change that you've really noticed going from the young men working on computers in the '90s to the Colonel of today? - Wow, so that's really a tough question. I mean, technically I think not much has changed. I mean, in the way the technology has changed with the understanding, the basis, the foundation of the technology, it has evolved with the evolving technology. So I don't think much has changed from that standpoint. I think what's really changed for me is just my position within that technology. You know, when I was a young airman, I was on the keyboard, I was doing that job. And that's now evolved to where I have to oversee that and create the strategic guidance to put that those people in that technology in the right place. So I think that's just evolving within career field for everybody. And somewhere along the line, all our people within our Wing will enter that. And hopefully we're able to continue to grow them to get to the point where they are managing or they are leading, or they are developing as opposed to doing. But it's important to go through that evolution to be a doer, to understand it, to get your hands dirty and then evolve in your career field and your career path. So I think that's what I would say as my answer to that question. I think it's just, you know, do what you're doing today and grow in that. - Right, no, good points, Sir, right? That continuum of learning is a key piece as a leader, right? As we start out as young airmen, young officers, young enlisted and we continue to grow within our AFSCs and then in our job descriptions and positions that if we don't continue to learn then we'd definitely start to atrophy. As we've seen those evolution changes within Comm, being somewhat of a support function and now cyber being much more of an operational mindset. Are there any key points that you'd like to point out there that

would help us with that paradigm shift of going from a support-type of career field to a much more operationally mindset and career field? - Sir, that's a challenging question because that takes a lot of movements from a lot of different levels of the service and above and administration and in a country because yes, you're right, we're all in an, we should be in an operational mindset now but there's some things that we're still working through to make that work. So as the community as a whole of cyber, progresses and matures like our Wing is constantly maturing. I think we need to put our people in the right situations to focus on the operations. I think we do that very well in places but I think we need to improve upon that as a whole and change the minds in many different levels and some rules and policies to where we can allow all our airmen to focus on the operational aspect of cyber as opposed to that support. Now when we say this, we have a whole, we have a whole array of what we do in cyber. And some of that still is support and some will continue to be support. So we need to keep the success in that support area as we work through the other operational pieces that you had mentioned in your question. - No, good point, Sir. Right. And even in some of those traditional positions that we've talked about in the past, your group specifically has a wide variety of mission sets. I guess that's gotta be somewhat of a challenge. And I was wondering what challenge are you most looking forward to as the new commander of the 860th? - Yeah, so I've been involved with the Wing for three years now and I was working up at the MAJCOM trier. And so I was very much involved with the Wing. And I mentioned this in an earlier answer but I'm looking most forward to is the continue maturity of the organization from the Wing to my group to the Squadron that are within the group. And even to working process with the 960th COG as a whole, I want to see us continue to evolve and continue to mature. I think process improvements, all, a lot of the things we are very much starting and have been working through in the near past and continue to dwell into the future. Just get us to a level where we are truly successful in the missions that we are overseeing. - Gotcha, Sir. And over those three years while with the Wing, what kind of changes have you seen as per the Wing and that you wanna foster forward as we continue and as you continue in your current role? - Yeah, so I mean, just becoming a Wing, it was such a huge step and that just happened, that's in recent memory. So it takes a while to make a Wing, a Wing and it takes a while to make a group, a group and so on and so forth. And as you mentioned, the vast missions, we've been the 860th. Those were just put together, you know, those are missions and people that are working together, relationships that are being built. It still mix things in the way that, that's functioning. So I think that, that's what I wanna see happen is us being together and successfully matching the missions or meeting the missions that are given to us. And right now we're still trying to figure out how to do that. Well, the processes, the people, there's just so much that goes into building an organization. And we're just starting down that road and I, and the Colonel Jones and the Colonel Erredge that really started to build that mentality. And we're taking great steps in some of the things we're doing strategically to really build the path forward for the organization as a whole. - That's some good points there, Sir. Obviously, a big portion of your group is the contingency communications mission set that you have out there, you have a lot of combat commerce out there and those guys are an excited group. And I guess the

question they're going to be asking you is when are you going to get out of the field and start setting up some equipment, Sir? - Yeah, they've already asked. - (Laughs) All right. I've been in the street for four days and I think I've been asked that question twice. - (Laughs) Now, three (laughs) And I'm sure you'll get asked that a couple more times throughout the weekend and as you assume command. - Absolutely, as I still look forward to it, one of those steps along my journey was I got to spend a year in Afghanistan. And I was not on a base. I got to travel around. I lived in among the, I lived in tents. I kind of miss those days. I tell the, I told the Combat Comm Squatter and look, I'm not as young as I used to be. And this back and my knees, they've done their time. So as much as my mind's in it, and you better believe I'm gonna go 100% and then play and playing the game and join into the things they do at the Squadron level, they need to at least keep it within some limits. - Yes, Sir, as a fellow older dog, I would say never let them look yet, see you wince and have plenty of vitamin M in your pocket to keep through the day, right. - Well, okay. - And give them a hard time, as much as you can. I want to roll back a little bit more and ask you some more personal questions. What kind of sports, you talked about how you played sports in college and what kind of sports were you playing, Sir? - I played baseball at that point. - Okay, do you still play baseball? - I try, there's a few folks in the Wing that still get out there on the field. I get out and practice with them. I actually haven't played in a game for some time only because that same principle of getting older, then the eyes and the reflexes don't work as well either. So I'll do it to a limit. Fortunately, I have younger boys and I get to live through them. I get to coach a lot now and I get out there in the field and play around but I try to stay away from the competitive piece as much 'cause I can go a little bit overboard and then that hurt myself off. - Gotcha and do you see a lot of, I guess, parallel lessons from sports that you do with parallel lessons in leadership within the Air Force? - Absolutely, I mean, there's a lot of parallels there and that I think the most, the biggest one is teamwork. I see everything I do, nothing I do is me. Everything I do is part of the team. And I'm thinking of the group I've been, I think of the Wing. When I think of the Air Force Reserve line, I think of the Air Force, we're all one big team. The whole tier by saying that I'm a big proponent of tier by I think we need to work together and not separately. We need to work (mumbles) all together to be successful. And we are all part of that and even in sports, you have a defense, you have an offense, you have, whatever else, center men, whatever. There's different functions on a field or in any sport, most sports at least, most teams sports. And the same things apply to the leadership and to the way we function in our organizations. I mean, we have to work together and we have to be, we have to make that work in order to be successful. - Yes, definitely, Sir. You know, each team member has their function. Each team member has their place and each one is just as equally vital as the other, right? And then the way you broke it down with, even the planning cycles of a team sport come into play where the general managers come in, the coaches to make sure that people are in the right place at the right time and sequencing all those things out. I think those are great points to be made within the Air Force leadership and when it comes to even down to the lowest work center level. So I appreciate that tier answer. So we're getting close to the end of the podcast right now. I was wondering if there was anything that you might want to part words with

or share with any other the gladiators out there, Sir? Any words of wisdom? - Yeah, I'm gonna circle back, I mean, I was saying this over and over again to our gladiators to just live in the moment, play your role 'cause your role will increase as you move forward throughout your career and focus on the core values. I mean, we learned that in basic training, we learned it in OTS, it's there for a reason. As chief mentioned earlier when he summed that all up, values are so important to our lives and our careers and to the things we do because they keep us grounded in being successful and that successful is an individual and as a team. So, just always concentrate on integrity first service before self and excellence in all you do, thank you. - Awesome, thank you, Sir. I really do appreciate you taking the time. I know that it has been a huge transition with the move taking on the command and you're just stretched very thin. So the fact that you took the time is wonderful, Sir. And to the gladiators out there, I want to say thank you for your time for listening. Thank you for all that you do. And thank you for your commitment not only to the reserves but to your country. And with that, good day. (Soft music)