

## Ep. 35: Command chief's farewell

[Narrator] Welcome to Sword and Shield, the official podcast of the 960<sup>th</sup> Cyberspace Wing. Join us for insight, knowledge, mentorship and some fun, as we discuss relevant topics in and around our wing. Please understand that the views expressed in this podcast are not necessarily the views of the U. S. Air Force, nor the Air Force Reserve, and no endorsement of any particular person or business is ever intended. (Upbeat music)

Welcome to another episode of the "Sword and Shield." This is Chief Master Sergeant Christopher Howard, Superintendent of the 960<sup>th</sup> Cyberspace Operations Group. And today with me I have... - Your Command Chief, Chief Master Sergeant Brian Bischoff. - Awesome, hey, thanks Chief. I appreciate you talking to me today. This is kind of bittersweet, right? I believe this is your last podcast as the Command Chief. - Yeah, so I think this is my second or third one, something like that, but yeah, last one. And then moving on to elsewhere that I can continue to do more damage, so. - Gotcha, so where are you moving on to, kind of let everybody know what assignment as you've moved forward on in your career? - So, where I'm going next? - Yes, Chief. - So, I'm going to the JECC, the Joint Enablement Capabilities Command, and essentially what they do there is they're able to stand up a remote standing joint task force. So, they've got command and control essentially, but they've got PA, they've got a planning element, they got a common element, those kinds of things. And they have been around for about 13 years. They've never had a senior enlisted leader before, so I'll be the first one coming in there. It's a joint unit, so I'll be working for an army two-star. - Awesome. - So, I'm sure there's going to be a lot of questions of who's this Air Force guy running around here, so. - (Laughs) I'm sure you'll let 'em know pretty quick and put the elbow to the forehead, right? - Absolutely, absolutely. - But being the first ever, that's not something new for you, seeing that you're the first ever Command Chief for the 960<sup>th</sup>. - Yes, so throughout my Air Force career, I've been, as I like to call it, the guinea pig for a lot of stuff. They try and make it sound really cool where, oh; you're the first ever. And I'm like, "That equates to guinea pig." So, I stood up at 913<sup>th</sup> Airlift group and I was the first Superintendent of that. And then, the first Command Chief here, and now the first Command Chief IMA, they've never had an IMA Command Chief before or a Command Chief job at a joint unit. So, a couple of other first, but like I said sometimes it could be guinea pig, we'll just put Bischoff in there and see how this pans out. - Gotcha, but it's also kind of like trailblazing, right? And when we look at where we were when you first took the seat here at the 960<sup>th</sup>, how would you say we've progressed? - Yeah, so I would definitely say a lot of progression. I'm not gonna lie, my first day here, I got back over to lodging, and was sitting in the parking lot and smoking a cigar, and thinking what the heck did I get myself into, right? Again, I came from an environment in special operations where everything, matured processes, it was a wing that'd been around for a long time. And I knew exactly what was going on. And when I came in here, and of course, 960<sup>th</sup> had only been a wing for about six months. So, there was a whole lot of, we have no idea what you're

talking about. So, I started asking status of discipline and what's that? And I'm like, "That's the thing we're supposed to do "once a quarter" and everybody. So, but what was good is much like when I had to go to the 44th Fighter Group this summer, the good thing is I know exactly what needs to be done. The bad thing is I know exactly what needs to be done. So, a lot of work and stuff involved, but all I had was the vision of, okay, here's the things that we need to get done, but it was all of us together as a team that were able to get all these things squared away. And that's like that whiteboard I have in my office, and I had all these different things, these different tasks and policies and procedures and so forth that a functioning wing needs to have had done and written out and codified. And we, and when I say we, I mean all of the 960th, came together and like the awards guy that were all the chiefs got to hack off on the awards guard and superintendents and everything, and cussed and discussed that whole thing and come up with a guide, because when I got here, there wasn't one. So again, I think a lot of things have come a long way. We got a lot of the framework and stuff put in place and I look forward to see where you guys are taking everything next now that a lot of the framework is there, you can now take it to the next evolution. - Gotcha, so this leads to probably what seems like an obvious question, what are you most proud of accomplishing while being here at the 960th? - Wow, good question, the thing I'm most proud of? I would just say being able to see all of the changes and the people succeeding and getting things done. I can't really point to one task or anything, but it's kind of I guess the best way you can describe it is if you're a teacher, and then you see all these kids graduate, and you see people get promoted, and you see people move on and stuff, and that's the thing about being a Command Chief, trust me, there's more days than not where you're thinking, I am one bad meeting away from retirement, forget this, I'm out. But it's like playing a slot machine, and then you see something cool where you help somebody get something figured out or you see somebody get promoted from step promotion or something else. And it is like, you just put that quarter in a slot machine and you just won 20 bucks, now you're hooked again and you're putting more quarters in. But it really is just seeing folks succeed, and mature, and win the Info Dominance Awards, and excited about what they're doing in the work centers, and you see people progress up to different positions and everything else. And just watching everything kind of mature and blossom compared to what it was when I first got here. And like I said, that's been a complete team effort. That's everybody digging in and working hard to get us to where we are. - Right, just to kind of peel that back a little bit, it really goes to some of the leadership philosophies that you and I have discussed many times, right? And some of the importance of these different lessons, can you speak to the series that you're working on right now that you're publishing as far as the mentorship moments and? - Yeah, so absolutely. So right now, and I did this thing when it started when I was at Little Rock, and I started doing a Mentorship Moment weekly, at that time it was a weekly email that went out to everybody, and I got about 300 episodes of those done. And a buddy of mine actually put it into a book format that I've got sitting on my laptop somewhere, but I quit doing it for a while because I kind of ran out of things that I felt were important to say. And then, Colonel Janicki actually had asked me, he said, "Hey, you know, I used to love getting those. "You need to start doing 'em again." And then, Chief White, AFRC Command

Chief said, "Hey, I really, you know, used to love getting those "when I was at the Wing, "you need to start doing that again." So, I started 'em up, and I think I'm on episode 18, volume 18 or 19 now, something like that. But I'm doing a series right now to build resiliency. And some of the things that I'm talking about in there, now if you wanna get on the distal list for this, please just shoot me an email, and I'm the only chief Bischoff out there, and I'll add you to the distal list. But right now it goes out to all the AFRC Command Chiefs and a handful of other folks out there. But so, it's a five-week series on resiliency. So, I talk about, ignore an override. Sometimes there's stuff that's going to happen in your life that you can't control it, you have no control over, and it just happened, and but you can't focus on it at that moment. So, you have to ignore what's going on and override, push forward to get to the next step, get to the next mission, get to whatever you need to do. Just throw it in your ruck and keep moving on. And then, when you have time to unpack that, that's when you work with friends, or family or teammates, or whoever, counselors, chaplains, to be able to kind of unpack it and deal with all those thoughts and feelings and emotions around that. And then, another one of 'em is, boy, I gotta think of now, so had that one, ignore an override. Another one is it's about the team. It's all about the team. So, and that really talks about how there's times where you wanna quit but you don't quit at things because of the team, it's because of the person next to you. There's times where you lean on the team and there's times where teammates lean on you, but you're together, you're stronger together than you are apart. A team is a completely different animal than a group of individuals 'cause the team is there for one another; they draw strength from one another. And if you've just got a group of individuals, then that's not really anything that you can count on or trust. So, but anyway, yeah, so there's five different things I'm going over there. And it's just some basic tools that I've used to when stuff goes sideways, which happens in my life a lot, Murphy's ever present, then I always just use one of these to be able to improvise, adapt and overcome. - Right, no, I think the team concept is very key, right? And if we look into what we call "the brotherhood of being a military member", right? It is really just another term for that team mentality, right? And if I know that I've dug into it, I think we've talked about it at least once or twice with the team concept, it's I'm gonna do it for them because they would do it for me, right? And building that relationship and how important it is as a leader to foster that kind of culture. Do you feel like we're in the right direction or headed in the right direction to build that type of culture here at the 960th? - I think we are, I think there were a lot of... So, I'm very big on tribal leadership, right? And so, you kind of break down all the different squadrons into tribes 'cause they've got unique mission sets and everything, and there's probably little sub-cultures underneath that as well. But I've seen all of the units maturing a lot and growing. And I've seen more cohesion because I think for a while, folks were thinking, hey, we need to change some stuff, but nothing's changing. And now they see some stuff is changing. And it's within tribal leadership; you've got the five levels. And normally when you come into a unit, you do an assessment of where the preponderance of the folks are in those five levels. And so, level one is everything sucks. - Right. - Right? And this normally like your people that are in prison and stuff like that, 'cause it's just, everything sucks. Level two is my life sucks. So, you think of kind of like "The Office" stuff, stuff like that, the show

"The Office", and where just it kind of stinks right now. You're not happy where you're at, and you want to go somewhere else and do something else. And level three is I'm great, but you're not. So, this is when you're an environment where you've got a bunch of people who believe their own write-ups, and they're the smartest guy in the room, or girl in a room and very much egocentric and about themselves, and everybody else is less than. And then, you've got level four, which is we're great. So not I'm great, but we're great. And that's where you have kind of think of the Apples or the Microsofts or NetApps, or some of these larger companies or organizations that it has a culture that everybody wants to be a part of but in order to continue to succeed and reach the level that they're at, they normally have a natural competitor. So, Apple had Microsoft, NetApp had Dell and HP, and a bunch of the other competitors. And that was the thing, where if you think about college sports, well, you're an Alabama fan, so obviously, Auburn, forget those guys. But that's what makes you great and you draw strength from is to trying to beat your competitors. You're working together as a team and you'll be better than your competitor. And then, level five is everything's great. And that's more of the altruistic where kind of a SOFWERX or AFWERX type thing where we're trying to solve big world problems, and there's no real competition. We're just trying to do something that's awesome for the planet and humanity as a whole. So, coming in here, there were a lot of pockets I think of two when I got here, level two where my life sucks and they weren't happy about, and there were some chunks of three in there, and some toxic environments and some environments that people weren't real happy with, and kind of needed some direction. And let's say when we get started on travel vouchers, right? Everybody was super torqued about that. - That was level one, definitely. - That was definitely level one. Everybody was torqued about that. And in matter of fact, that was the first thing I was tasked with is we need to fix these. So, that's why we up with cyber block and we had started the fieldmen working out all that stuff. But so, I think now, looking at most of the units and engaging with 'em, I would say a lot of the units went from two and three to I would say probably three and four. So, you may still have one or two, you're always going to have one or two people that are sitting at level two. But I would say for the most part, we've got a lot of three and four going on here, and which is good. Like I said, it means that things are progressing, things are maturing, things are growing, and getting better and better, so. - Gotcha, so yeah, I think that we've made a lot of progression just from my perspective, obviously. That's why I asked Shores as well, is then how do we, as leaders, tell that Tech Sergeant how do they contribute to taking that unit to whether they're there at that two or three range up to that three to four range? - Yeah, so and number one, everybody has to realize that they're an important cog in the machine, right? What they do is important in mission success and being able to accomplish that mission. So, a large portion of it is being able to make them feel like they have some skin in the game, like they have some say in it, if they just feel like, oh, I'm just Tech Sergeant Bischoff, and time to make the donuts, and I'm just here, hacking on the keyboard, and hacking the mission stuff, and whatever, and don't really have any say or skin in the game or whatever, then I'm just a kite in the storm, right? I'm going wherever the wind takes me, and don't really feel like I have a whole lot of control, but if that's where you had all these

innovation cells that were popping up everywhere, everybody wants to be in innovation, innovation. Hey, that's swell, folks, but here's the deal. If you sit down and actually talk with somebody over, and not just expect a snap answer on it, we were like, hey, we are interested in your input in different ways of doing these things, right? And not hamstringing somebody, but just saying, "Here's what we need to do, folks. "Let's use our knowledge, skills and abilities "in order to figure out how to get there." And that's I use the "Star Trek" analogy all the time. So, Captain Kirk was normally unless he was like, "Hey, you gotta make a snap decision," and shields up and shooting people and stuff, if there was some kind of situation going on, which normally happened all the time, he normally wasn't the dude making the call. Normally what he'd do is he gets everybody in it, right? So, he's got Scotty from engineering, and he's got Spock and he's got the doctor in there, he's got Bones in there, and everybody else, he's like, "All right, what do you think? "What do you think, what do you think? "You know, what do you got on this?" And then once he got everybody's input, he was able to make a good, solid decision as the leader to say, "Okay, boom, we're going in, "and we're taking these guys out, "or this is how we're getting out "of the situation or whatever." And to me, that's what's important as leadership is you're not necessarily looking for somebody else to answer the question, but you wanna be able to get everybody's input so they feel like they're part of the solution and part of getting from here to there. And there's some pride in that, right? Then they feel like, hey, that idea I came up with about how we can do some stuff to get these travel vouchers fixed, that was my idea, and they're excited about that, and they wanna be a part of that. So, it's all about just drawing everybody together to make sure that they feel like they're a contributing part of the team and not just along for the ride. - Yeah, that buy-in is definitely key, as well as identifying the why, right? From a one-on-one relationship, from supervisor to supervisee, mentor to mentoree, right? Is understanding why are we here, both internally and then for the organization? - Right. - Yeah, and then moving on into getting everybody to have that input and be part of the solution so that that buy-in then drives that organization up to the next level. - Right. - I wonder if there's any kind of key words of advice that you would like to give to the gladiators at this point? - I would say it's kind of like, I talked to the 53rd a little bit earlier today and some other folks out there, but I would say always be ready. And actually, we were talking to a Major Trace about this last night. - Yup. - So, he asked me, Major Trace asked me, he said, "Well, you know, how did you plan out "becoming a Command Chief and doing all this stuff?" And I said, "I didn't, not at all. "This was just a lot of luck and preparedness." So, really, I had no plan on getting past Master Sergeant. So, how I ended up here and being a two, about to be three time Command Chief is just, I don't know, I'm gonna say pretty much sheer luck, but more importantly, it's just being ready for the opportunity. And I was a Senior Master Sergeant, and I got picked up to be a Chief because I had everything in hot ready status. I had all my PME, I had fitness done, I had a bachelor's degree. I had everything that I needed to have to be required. And as soon as opportunity knocked, I answered and I was ready. When opportunity knocks, that's not the time to start thinking about doing your PME, or your education, or getting that certification, or whatever it is, you need to be in a hot ready status. So, when opportunity knocks, boom, it's munitions off the

rail and something's happening here. So, that's the best thing, the best kind of advice I can give to anybody, especially everybody here at the 960th is just continue working on being ready for that next opportunity, whatever that is, 'cause you never know when it's coming and you never know what it's gonna be. But if you're continually working on yourself to get in that hot ready status and be ready for whatever's gonna come knocking, then it's just a fire and forget it situation because it knocks once, and it's not gonna hang out for you, it's not gonna wait for you, it's not going to come back later. You got one shot, and if you're not ready to pull the trigger on it, then it's moving on and you just missed that opportunity. So, that's my biggest piece of advice is always work on yourself, always add your secret sauce what's making you stand out from everybody else, and just be ready for that opportunity. - That's some great words of advice, Chief, right? 'Cause if you're not ready, then opportunity will pass. - Yeah, absolutely. - So, if you were to come back in a few years, what would you hope to see out of the 960th? - Hmm, come back in a couple of years, what would I like to see out of the 960th? Well, Colonel (beep) not parking in the inappropriate spots anymore, so no more parking in the Vice Commander's spot, unless he's Vice Commander, then it's fine. So, but no, in all seriousness, I'd like to see some more the programs that we built the framework for advanced, refine some of the processes. I would love to see all the voucher situation cut by three-quarters of what it is now, and have good solid processes going through. I'd like to see that we have more indigenous support going on here at the 960th. And what I mean by that is we get some more finance folks. We get some more comp folks, we get some CSSFS, and I'd like to be able to see that the 960th is getting more of its own resources instead of having to rely on the 433rd so much in some areas. So, I'd like us to be able to have a little bit more control over driving our own train, and then continuing to flesh out what information warfare in looks like, and grow as a wing to be more all inclusive and a good mission partner to lash up solid with the 16th Air Force and our other active duty wing mission partners to make sure that we're lethal, we're agile, we're ready and adaptable. So, I'd really like to just basically see the maturation of the 960th continue along the lines it is now. And I'm very excited to see what it's going to look like at that point. - Gotcha, no, I think that's a great vision, right? If we can just be a much more mature wing with a lot more control of our environment, I think that'll be a big success. I definitely feel like over the last two years, we went from being very reactive and almost out in the cold when it came to a wing to where we are today, going back to your checklist of items when we looked at all those different processes that needed to be started from scratch, even matured from the concepts that they were as the CyOG, I think that we're much more aligned and can be seen as a wing as a whole from the outside than we were two years ago. So I know on behalf of a lot of individuals within the wing, I'm the one to say thank you for championing those items forward, right? So, the vouchers have been cleaned up. They're not perfect or nowhere close, but based on that vision, and that mentorship, and the hard work of people like Sergeant Vielman and some of the unit reps, now we have individuals that are willing to stay, right? When we talk about expeditionary calm. And I think that's a legacy that definitely anyone can be proud of. So thanks, Chief. - Yeah, no, like I said, it has definitely been a team effort of getting there. And I think we went from being

completely reactive to I'd say middle of the road right now, kind of neutral. And then I'd like to see in a few years from now, a couple of years from now we're 90% proactive, so we're getting out ahead of stuff and not scrambling at the last minute to try and meet deadlines and suspenses and work problems and figure things out. But getting ahead of the message there a little bit. - Gotcha, I know you and I could chat probably all day for a week straight and still not come back to the same subject, but with the podcast, we're kind of limited on time. I didn't know if you would like to close out with anything that you'd like to say to the gladiators. - So, just wanna say thanks to everybody for everything that you've done, thanks for putting forth the effort, having the passion and energy and drive to continue pushing forward and pushing forth, and being innovative, bringing up great ideas, and just being engaged as you are, it's truly been an awesome experience and an honor to serve alongside you. And I appreciate what you do for the country. I appreciate what you do for protecting your family and my family, because we know we're not the bad guys out there, and we know that we're one of the few things that stand between them and us. So, I appreciate everything you do. I appreciate you staying on watch. I appreciate you continuing to push forward even though sometimes you probably don't hear thanks enough, I'd like to say thanks. - Awesome, thank you, Chief. I know that on behalf of the 960th Cyber Wing gladiators, thank you for your dedication, thank you for your mentorship, thank you for your guidance, thank you for the energy, right? All of those things lead all of us towards that goal that we've set forth. And the fact that that challenge that you constantly put on them helps drive them there. I know that you've personally challenged me in a couple of situations to do better. And I definitely feel like I've met a lot of those things that I definitely wouldn't necessarily be as successful today if it wasn't for that guidance, that mentorship and that friendship. So, thank you, Chief. And to the gladiators out there, hope you have a great month. Thank you for listening and thank you for being part of this great wing. - Chief out. (Upbeat music)