

Ep. 49: Introducing the 52nd Network Warfare Squadron

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[Christopher] Welcome to another episode of the Sword and Shield. I'm Chief Master Sergeant Christopher Howard, 960th Cyberspace Operations Group superintendent. And today with me, I have... - [Ben] Major Ben Hendrickson. I'm the 52nd Network Warfare Squadron Director of Operations. - [Christopher] Welcome, sir. I appreciate you taking some time today. I just wanted to share with our Gladiators kind of what does the 52nd NWS do? - [Ben] So basically our, our, our, our main focus is primarily around OPSEC and we, we... - Okay. Our weapons system is the Cyber Defense Analysis, the CDA weapon system, which composes of basically the Fidelis and a cyber operational risk assessment tool. And a cyber operational risk assessment tool. - [Christopher] Okay. - [Ben] In addition to a radio frequency monitoring system which is our new, our new toy. We just got this prior to kind of entering Covid. - [Christopher] Okay. - [Ben] So it's something we're very excited about prior to, we had to kind of shut the doors, and worked from home for a while. So, the RFMS So, the RFMS So, the RFMS as we call it, is something that we're very excited about because it's something that we can, we can deploy with and we can take out and set up in the field, and, and some of our, our customers I guess you could say the, you know 67th, they, they, they are, are supposed to do a risk assessment annually they are, are supposed to do a risk assessment annually or multiple of them actually. - [Christopher] Okay. - [Ben] So they reach out to the 68s, which we are, so they reach out to the 68th, which we are, are kind of a subsidiary of. - [Christopher] Right. You're one of the associated units to the 68th? Right? - [Ben] That's right, yes. - [Christopher] Awesome. And you guys are located where? You're one of our volunteer base. - [Ben] Yeah. So we're a geographically separated unit up in Offutt, Omaha, Nebraska. - [Christopher] Nice. - [Ben] We are located in an old World War II style hangar. - [Christopher] Okay, so you're in the old Martin Bomber building there? - [Ben] That's right. That's right. Yeah. Yeah. - [Christopher] I was stationed in at Offutt for a number of years. I loved being up there. You know, it's one of those hidden gems of the Midwest. - [Ben] Yeah - [Christopher] where like the gym, the gym is phenomenal. - [Ben] It's terrific. I think the biggest in the DOD. - [Christopher] Right. There's indoor track, it's got the indoor swimming pool, it's got indoor basketball, it's got an indoor a soccer field. It has all the weights, everything. It was, it was great. And then of course, Omaha itself. - [Ben] Ah, yes. - [Christopher] All the big concerts come through, you've got the Henry Doorly Zoo, it's just a - - [Ben] College world series. - [Christopher] Oh, exactly, right? Some great things. - [Ben] Olympic swimming I think, it was good. - Gotcha. You know, gets a little cold in

winter. - [Ben] Yeah. - [Christopher] And it gets a little hot in summer, but all in all, it was a, I had a great tour up there in Offutt. But, what AFCs does your unit carry? - [Ben] So we're, we're primarily, so we're unique in this from a cyber perspective. We also have a large contingent of Intel analysts. - [Christopher] Okay. - [Ben] So we have a handful of Intel officers, of 14 men. - [Christopher] Okay. - [Ben] And then we also have the one who knows, that are kind of our, our all source analysis. - [Christopher] Right. - [Ben] Which really kind of helps benefit the cyber analysis piece of things. - [Christopher] Right. - [Ben] So we're uniquely postured to kind of develop - [Ben] so we're uniquely postured to kind of develop more of an Intel perspective on these cyber analysis. - [Christopher] Right. And you have three deltas as well. Is that three D0's or three D1's? - [Ben] That's - both. - [Christopher] Okay. Gotcha. So I wonder if you can kind of also walk some of our gladiators through, you know, what is a day in the life look like at the 52nd, or network or first quarter? - [Ben] Sure. So basically we will run our sorties usually on a drill weekend we'll do that twice during the drill weekends. Our sorties run for four hours. - [Christopher] Okay - [Ben] we have four people that'll do that. So we have one that's kind of the, the manager of the team and then the team comes in and does their, their work throughout that four-hour period. - [Christopher] Awesome. - [Ben] And then on top of that - So, we'll sort them all through the day So, we'll sort them all through the day So, we'll sort them all through the day doing that for, for both days, doing that for, for both days, which gives them, which is great for the analysts that they're able to come in and actually do some, some work with their hands. - [Christopher] Great. - [Ben] And it, it kinda, it gives them a perspective of how valuable this Cyber Defense Analysis tool is. Of how valuable this Cyber Defense Analysis tool is. - [Christopher] Right. Yeah. Getting those reps are really important, right, especially for a TR. You have that 28 days in between, real, in most cases, you know, give or take a day or two depending on, but getting these reps on the equipment and getting that experience. - [Ben] So on top of that, we'll do, you know our mandatory training that we have to do. And you know, we try to fit in some, you know, as a unit, we're still a squadron and we're still a unit - [Christopher] Right. - [Ben] We'll do some fun things too. So we try to get everybody together, you know, as soon as we can, - [Christopher] Got you - [Ben] as soon as we can get back to in-person drilling, which we plan on doing in June. Which we plan on doing in June. - [Christopher] Okay. - [Ben] Full AT and things like that. - Right. And in the past, if correct me, if I'm wrong you guys like to plan your AT together as well. So you guys do a full two weeks together and get after a different problem set, correct? And getting with more reps up? - [Ben] That's correct. That's right. Yes, we do that. It's, it's good. It's, it's good. We think it's valuable for, I mean, I just arrived in January, I just arrived in January, - [Christopher] Okay. - [Ben] So I've been kind of in a joint role, you know, - [Ben] So I've been kind of in a joint role, you know, up until this point, so - [Christopher] Okay, got you. - [Ben] You know, coming back into the unit level has been a great experience for me to kind of get re-indoctrinated if you will - [Christopher] Gotcha. - [Ben] into Air Force Customs again. And I say that to say And I say that to say that this unit is very well meshed that this unit is very well meshed and we, I think we do so well because we all act as a team and everybody looks out for each other. - [Christopher] Right. Now, it's one of the things that I hear, you know in feedback

about the 52nd is that, that family atmosphere. Can you kind of explain that maybe that first day you arrived? What it felt like to be part of the unit, right? - [Ben] Sure. I mean, from day one, from the day that I was selected for the position, to the day I arrived, it was nothing, but - they rolled out the carpet for me, which was nice. And I just assumed that was because I was the new DL but they do that for everyone. So, you know, and I've now been a part of that and we've had new people come to the unit and we kind of just to show them open arms, like welcome to Omaha, welcome to a World War II style building and (laughing) - [Christopher] It's phenomenal, right? - [Ben] It's kind of neat to see, you know, from the unit perspective how you fit, into the big picture and strategically, like how, you know, that big moving plane is, is going a thousand miles an hour. And we were down at the surface kind of just watching, but, they're, seeing, seeing how everything plays together and from a cyber perspective, just knowing how important our work is. - [Christopher] Right. - [Ben] Really, really kind of I think it, our analysts kind of take that to heart, so. - [Christopher] No, agreed, right. I think that when we look at the different domains we discuss within the DOD, we're talking about air, sea, land. We talk about space and cyberspace and those are the two contested domains consistently. Right? It doesn't go away. And that cyber analysis is key to understanding what the battlefields looking like on a daily basis. You know, what some of that threat looks like so that our leadership can make decisions and move assets and resources against that contested environment on a regular basis. So, I mean, I think it's, it's a key position and definitely think that you and the 52nd, and partners in crime in the 50th and 68th, are definitely a big contributors and 68th, are definitely a big contributors to the success of what we have in this domain. - [Ben] Yup, agreed. - [Christopher] So with that said, you know, we talked a little bit about how it felt to be a brand new member in that family atmosphere, but what specifically does the 52nd do to develop airmen throughout their life at the 52nd? - [Ben] So we, again, as I said before, are very tight knit. So I mean our first shift to our superintendent and, and, you know, we've, we've we have two, full-time - sorry, we have three full-time individuals, myself, Master Ducker, and then Ms. Daniel Robert. Myself, Master Ducker, and then Ms. Daniel Robert. So we all kind of, there's three of us a lot of people don't really, I think truly understand - [Christopher] How small knit - - [Ben] Yeah. How small actually we are as a footprint, - [Christopher] Right. - [Ben] With the, you know, the larger impact. But to get to your question to, you know, what do we do to develop an airman. You know, we have a pretty robust training plan. You know, the things I mentioned before, sorties and, get that experience, but also grabbing their opportunities as well. Like, - [Ben] You know if there are opportunities with the RFMS, like I mentioned, to get some real world operational experience, I feel is very important. And also kind of lends to where they can where they can develop, you know, further down the road whether they're, 1 and alls or 3 deltas or, you know, wherever their quality of work may well lead. Their quality of work may well lead. - [Christopher] May lead them to, right, you know. Exactly right. So, you know, one of those key things about being in a leadership role is finding those right opportunities for that skill set that's out there. - [Ben] That's right. - [Christopher] Finding the airmen, that NCO that's primed for, you know, leading a team. So with the small packages, like RMFS or even during your actual shift, what

do you give NCS opportunities to lead those, those shifts or lead those, those crews?

- [Ben] We have, yes. We have absolutely do. Those, for those sorties that we have, they're given those leadership opportunities because you know, as I mentioned, it's a, it's a very important job. - [Christopher] Right. - And I've been able to identify that not only identify those thresholds not only identify those thresholds that we put forward for them, but also to lead that team is something that, you know, as an airman is something that, you know, as an airman I think they really take a lot out of, experience-wise and building those leadership skills too. So not only from the sortie perspective, but also from, you know, in a drill weekend, there's a number of things that we have to accomplish. So we try to hand a lot of those responsibilities off as we can, choose different roles, and make sure people are getting that experience that comes with, you know, leading a team to, to accomplish our overall mission. - [Christopher] Right. What other kind of opportunities do you provide for those airmen and CEO's or senior NCO staff to lead? - [Ben] Other opportunities, I guess you could say, we were able to send them to you know, the, the Aaron leadership schools, Senior NCO Academy and things of that nature, - [Christopher] Right. - [Ben] But also, you know, being a reservist, you have the opportunity to take advantage of, of educational opportunities that not only the Air Force may provide, but our civilian side too. They will bring all the, the civilian forces, it really, really provides a unique, you know, gem for us as military leaders to take advantage of. - [Christopher] Great. That's awesome, right. And that kind of makes us kind of look towards the future as we develop our airmen, we can give them those opportunities. For the 52nd, what is, what do you see the future of the 52nd looks like? - [Ben] That's a great question. You know, it's kind of uniquely timed actually, as we talk, you know, there's a lot of things that are happening with our with our kind of mission set in general. - [Christopher] Right. - [Ben] It could be shifting to other areas that, you know, may have been loaded with more work in a different fashion or the same fashion. There's a lot of kind of unknowns there but on Offcutt we're uniquely situated next to the but on Offcuts we're uniquely situated next to the five 57th weather wing. - [Christopher] Okay. - [Ben] And, and we kind of drop back into General Hawk's, vision of the information warfare everybody's playing under the same umbrella. - [Christopher] Right. - [Ben] And so this weather wing opportunity that we have to provide our airmen opportunities, we have to provide our airmen opportunities, like an operational opportunity, I should say, - [Christopher] Okay. - [Ben] to help develop the weather wing and their information warfare, - [Christopher] Footprint whatever. - [Ben] in different environments, yeah. - [Christopher] I know that, you know, we look at the growth of cyber and we look at some of those demands. I believe that, you know, we're going to see an uptick in those mission defense to use those MDTs. - [Ben] Right. - [Christopher] And I know that there's opportunities for those that have been in this environment for a while to step up and lead and develop some of those skill sets. I think that's some of the stuff that you guys are looking at - [Ben] that's right. - [Christopher] in regards to that weather - [Ben] we're very excited about it, actually. - [Christopher] Okay. - [Ben] We've provided two individuals full-time, to help them develop their- 'cause they're, they used to be the Air Force weather agency obviously, and now formed into the wing and so we're helping one of them, their second weather support squadron kind

of from the ground up, - [Christopher] Oh, wow. - [Ben] Which is unique because - [Christopher] Right. - [Ben] Because, you know, a lot of us already step into well-developed squadrons or units. And so they're new at this and us being located where we are and us being located where we are able to provide that expertise. - [Christopher] And there's not a lot of reserved game in the town, right? - [Ben] That's right. - [Christopher] You know, being home STRATCOM being home, just some unique mission sets as a whole at the 55th point there. - [Ben] And the total force integration piece of that is - [Christopher] Crazy. - [Ben] Yeah. - [Christopher] And I know there's a lot of IMAs up there, but when it comes to classic associate or classic reserve squadron, I believe you're one of just a couple up there that actually execute it. So, and when it comes to cyber, the only one. - [Ben] That's right. - [Christopher] So I definitely look forward to seeing how that future might look. Is there anything else that you might want to talk about, in regards to the 52nd? - [Ben] No, it's as I said before, I'm kinda new to this role so. I see a lot of, a lot of I see a lot of, a lot of potential with this unit and just kind of, you know it may be scary is not the right word, but, there's a lot of unknowns with the melding of different units and mission sets, with the melding of different units and mission sets, but it also provides an open door to opportunity that I think the 52nd is very well positioned to take advantage of. So from that perspective, like, I'm very excited as I mentioned before, weather wing, how we're able to play in the, in the total force integration piece of this and I assume nothing but good value out of it. - [Christopher] Great. Yeah, and, you know, the challenges of change do lead to some apprehensions to the word scary but the reality is that it opens the door to opportunities, right, and that change brings things that are unknown and those that are flexible to get after the problem set, have an opportunity to define what this is going to look like in the future. Right? I think that's really where the 52nd sits. And as that door opens you guys are going to be able to fill in those roles, kind of set what that pace looks like, define what this is going to look like in that support role, help define what IW looks like. - [Ben] That's right. - [Christopher] And then from a TFI perspective there's all kinds of open doors. You know between StratCom, you guys there, and then geographically speaking, biggest game in town. - [Ben] Yeah - [Christopher] Right. I mean, really, there's not a lot up there. And that means that anybody that's living in that area or wants to relocate has an opportunity. Or wants to relocate has an opportunity. But what about as a leader? Anything that you would like to pass on to some of our gladiators, sir? - [Ben] Ah, leadership, I mean - Leadership is a great thing. Leadership is a great thing. But, you know, I, being on the joint side for so long, have been very excited about this opportunity because a squadron level leadership is really where it's at. You see, you sit and talk to, you know, the, the senior leaders, you can always reference their time as squadron level leadership as being the most valued. And I'm starting to, I'm starting to experience that now. Like myself I'm personally very excited about this opportunity and see, you know, where we take the squadron. But to the gladiators themselves, like, you know, it's, you find yourself in a in a very, very unique time that there's a lot changing and you keep hearing this "move with the kind of pace or relevance", right? - [Christopher] Right. - [Ben] And so that's kind of, - [Ben] And so that's kind of, in the past we've been so geared towards everything kind of stays the same, where here we're moving so fast

and it presents a real need and it presents a real need for that leadership, which I feel is in place. And I'm, I'm excited to be a part of it. - [Christopher] I think that we're building some strong leadership teams out there. I think that the resiliency of this constant change that we've gone through over the last year, year and a half will actually pay dividends in the future as we accelerate change of rules, as our mission set adjust to the great power competition and enemy second in front of us. I think that we're definitely prime for some successful moments here. - [Ben] Perfect. - [Christopher] I just wonder if there's any other things that you want to highlight about your 52nd team before we close it out. - [Ben] We have an amazing team. One of our rock stars, Hannah Panowitz recently was chosen for the Profiles Leadership poster, actually, and it hangs in the Pentagon. So we're very proud of that. - [Christopher] That's awesome, right. So, I know the competition can be kind of tight and we were really lucky as a wing to get a couple of individuals with you know, Panowitz and Major Fuller. But, yeah, your team has been knocked out of the park. I know that you guys lead the way in some of the a number of our programs and processes. - [Ben] She's amazing. We had her on orders pretty much throughout the last four or five months. We just recently ended her orders, but - [Christopher] Okay. - [Ben] amazing individual. And you talked about potential leadership. She's got that written all over her poster in the Pentagon - [Christopher] Awesome. Look forward to seeing what they can produce and you know the opportunities they're going to take advantage of it. What kind of leadership roles that they're going to move into. - [Ben] Definitely. - [Christopher] Awesome. Well, that concludes another episode of Sword and Shield, and want to tell all of our gladiators out there, thank you for your dedication to the mission, thank you for your dedication to your nation, and thank you for your dedication to this organization. It's the hard work that you put in that makes this organization successful. Hope you have a great day. (Upbeat music)