

## Ep. 65: Stories of 9/11

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. (Light music)

Welcome to another episode of the Sword and Shield. I am chief master sergeant Christopher Howard, 960th COG superintendent, and today with me I have Capt. William Hutto, 960th COG chief of standardizations and evaluations, and Master Sgt. Jarrett Miner, 854th Combat Operations Squadron NCO in charge of operations scheduling. Awesome, gentlemen, I really do appreciate you guys taking some time today. Um we were talking a little bit ago about 9 11 and kind of uh where were you? Right and uh you mentioned some discern minor about your time is one if you could share that with our gladiators about where were you? Um and some of the things that were going on that day. Absolutely. I joined the Air Force in May of 2000, I felt like I wanted to do something more meaningful in my life. I was going to school at the time and signed up to be an F 16 crew chief and I'm stationed at Luke Air Force Base in Arizona and had been working the mid shift And my whole world changed on September 11 because I woke up and saw that there were messages on my voicemail my mother had called, my girlfriend had called, everybody was trying to alert me to the fact that something had happened in new york to the twin towers and they called us all into work and we all got caught up on the news that was happening and then got on with her workday , Got you . So that really did change the workday. Right. I mean I think that all of us that were in during that time, that workday changed instantly and subsequently uh every day after that was different. So how did it change for you? Yes. So we worked at a training base, we trained F16 pilots and so we were aware that we stood in a position to have an effect on what was going to be going on to go after whatever adversary that our leadership had chosen. And so I took satisfaction in knowing that I had a part in training the pilots that we're going to be going overseas and flying missions. Um and so we did have to ramp up a little bit, We did have to increase our training capacity to make sure we can meet the demands of the pilots that were needed catching. Okay. Almost got really quick into a readiness posture, everybody getting prepped check and I m r who is everybody ready to go, everything updated um with the idea that there might be a forward deployment in the near future. Right? Absolutely. And that was something my mother was worried about when she had called, I could hear the distress in her voice because here she had her son who had just joined the Air Force and now this event is kicked off and she was afraid I was going to have to be deployed. Um But in my case I had the role of working there at the training base and supporting the pilot training. Were you excited? Were you fearful? I mean what was going on in your head when all this stuff starts going down that first few hours to that first day, two days, you know when everything starts ramping up? Really? I

think I just wanted to focus on work, figured that was the best way to handle things. The initial shock and grief uh for what had happened to my fellow Americans didn't set in until about a week later but being able to, I feel like I was part of something bigger and part of something that was gonna kind of help solve the problem got to understand. So I was actually overseas at the time already um when things were going down we were briefing a D. V. In our facility, I was actually in a bunker and in Germany and we get worked during the brief that the first tower has been hit. Um so we had just gotten this TV installed into the work center, having the cable feed into it. Uh we had Fox news and we had a F. N. And that was about it right there. I think we had CNN as well. So we only have like just a couple of stations, which was not abnormal, back then. Especially overseas. You know you had FN. That he had F. N. And then there was the time and true favorite Fn um that you could watch the whole time. So you know having these news outlets was pretty interesting. So bring that on and we're like man this is crazy right? I can't believe this is happening. And everybody's question is it an accident? Is it uh you know what happened? Why when did this plane hit? And then we bring on the T. V. And then we see the second one hit. And that's that reality moment right instantly everybody just well this is no longer an accident is no longer a mistake. This is purposeful. Um and uh you know that's when it starts setting in. I could I could still remember my stomach just kind of knotting up right there because we realized that uh you know holy this is going down. And so we brief our D. V. Um and we're explaining what's going on. We're showing them on the T. V. Uh Then his aid comes in and says okay pentagon has been hit. He's like all right we're bagging up, let's go uh him and his team rolls out. Uh so we're getting prepped. We start shutting down our facility to share, locking down the base and everybody is in the uh, you know, the oh mode, You know, pucker factor's high and everybody's getting prepped, We're running uh, different perimeter checks and the gates shut down, Everything's getting shut down and people are freaking out. We've got people stuck in cars on the base. They can't go anywhere because everything is just There. It's a parking lot and everybody's freaking out and there's nothing, nobody knows anything. So it's definitely crazy. Um, but how do you were somewhere completely different? So can you tell our listeners what was going on with you on 9-11 ? Sure I was 19 years old. I was a civilian still trying to figure out what the heck was going to do with my life. Um, I was working at the newspaper times and democrat, um, based out of Orangeburg South Carolina at the time. And I worked in the circulation department and I just remember that morning being fairly quiet and someone coming into our department saying, hey, there's a plane that hit one of the twin towers. Um, so I go to the break room and check it out and um, I just remember feelings of sorrow, kind of tragedy knowing that this type of accident had happened and occurred. Um, and as we're watching, of course the second plane hits and those, what was peculiar was those feelings slowly changed too suspicion. Uh, anger, questioning what the heck is going on. Um the news department that was just next door to us was an absolute chaos. Uh back then the news newspapers were still pretty much a major source for information way before iPhones, smartphones so you couldn't just pull out your phone and get you know, the latest, the latest news. So um walking through their people, writers and editors shouting like crazy, everybody's on the phone screaming

to try to figure out what, what's going on, reports coming in everywhere. Uh huh Every seems like every minute something was coming off the ap wire on a new piece of information that came in but it was so fragmented that it was hard to make sense of what's going on. And we uh we normally put out a daily newspaper, but the appetite for information was so great during that time that we put out a special edition for the afternoon. Um and we essentially gathered as much information as we could, packaged it up nicely and it was pretty much all hands on deck, take all these newspapers out to every place in the city newsstands, um anywhere where we can get this information out. I can remember walking into a convenience store with a stack of newspapers and people grabbing the newspapers out of my hands before they even hit the stand. And again the appetite and the desire for what, what's going on was so incredibly high As a 19 year old, that was the highest I've ever experienced or just a frenzy for information. Um, and then of course later on we hear the pentagon sit, the flight in Pennsylvania goes down. And then I think we all kind of realized that um, this is most likely an attacked and uh, I had been contemplating the military, the air force up to that point. Um, I hadn't made any decisions yet, but I think that's the catalyst that spurred me to go talk to recruiters. It took a while to eventually get into delayed entry and eventually into the Basically training, which was February 2003. But it was things like that and realizing there's a greater need, um, in the country right now. And I, I think that my time is better served, you know, in the military than it is um, being a bean counter for the circulation department of this newspaper. No, I mean, it's an interesting point, right? I think that it changed the perspective of many Americans at that point. I mean, all of us has been in for a day or two now and we've been through the greater part of, uh, you know, 20 years after the fact, um, those first few years really, the surge of recruitment, um, was based on that, that feeling that need to serve based on some of these issues that happened. Um, uh, so when you originally joined, what was the culture kind of like, Right, What was the feeling of service to you? Miner, well I can tell you it was a lot easier to get on base before that happened. Uh Things got a little more free and easy. Right? I remember, so like when everybody was joining, when I first came in in the nineties, it was like college, college, I'm doing my four years and getting my G. I. Bill and I'm gonna go to college and I'm gonna make something of myself and it was it was really focused in the line of, I'm going to leverage this service. We're good. Right, I'm going to I'm going to serve my country a little bit. I'm going to get a G I. Bill and then I'm going to go out and do something with it. I'm going to get a little bit of this piece for me. Um And then after 9 11 you start talking individuals and you hear stories like captain who does, where there was a sense or an urgency in some senses of having to serve and do something because um as an American, we just couldn't stand for this to go, you know, unacknowledged and working towards it. What do you think captain? Huh? So I agree and all of us that went in um and I can speak to those who were in my BMT flight or others uh that I met later on, we all kind of new, we would probably get oh, you know, tap for some type of deployment. We knew what we were going into Um I believe at that point in, in February of 03, we had already gone into Iraq um and we were just going into once in Afghanistan at the time and remember um Artie pulling us into the day room because CNN or Fox or someone was actually showing live footage of um missiles

being launched at night, you know, into wherever they were, whatever target it was um in that sense of like this is real. So we thought that we would probably be involved in something pretty big, something pretty important and then we're actually seeing it unfold before our eyes shocking. All right, it was shocking off for sure. Um and it made us realize really quickly um that our commitments were real, you know, so um that definitely impacted my very, very, very early outlook on my military career, you know, only being in like literally weeks at that point. So I never got to experience that kind of calm. I was a calm but more of that uh steady state, not at war. I mean I came in right at the tail end of take the money and run right, so everybody is getting the money and exiting when they were doing a big draw down. So it was a lot different, right? We were flushed with people. Um the mission set was pretty steady state. So yeah, we were doing the support for Kosovo and S. Four and then we were doing, you know, Southern Watch, Northern Watch on Iraq from uh post desert storm. So it was a lot different than normal rotations, It was a little bit more uh as you pointed out, minor again on base was you had a sticker on your window and it was you can you get to come in okay now in you come and uh you safe. And it was a little bit different because we had a little bit longer history of having a terrorist attacks. So you still get stopped at the gate quite often. It just depends. Um but then you know post 9 11 rights that that gate was shut down. I remember trying to get to my facility at Ramstein and uh I was in traffic for like 45 minutes and I couldn't go anywhere. So I turned around and parked in my apartment which was miles away, got on my mountain bike road, some back trails to get to the gate and got on base faster than anybody else did because it was that kind of crazy to get on. But we had to do a mission, right? So you know, it's definitely different going back to how crazy the newsroom was. Um I was in a calm facility right? And everything was just nutty circuits are lighting up circuit demands. Um circuit issues were just everybody, you know, the system itself would suggest everybody was clamoring for, what's going on? What are we doing, how we're gonna get out of this, what's our posturing, you know, going right into Charlie, shutting everything down and rolling back, How fast we roll back. What are those implementations? Uh you know, sit reps across the whole board. Um so we've got really, really crazy, really quick and for me personally never stopped at that point. Um you know, I've gotten picked up for another unit, I was went uh into a green door program and I was out and that that led to six years of nothing but nonstop out the door TV wise and deployments um for like six years of 190 days gone right. Um and then even looking a little bit back, I remember tech school and it was, you know, pretty 9 11 obviously and I remember sitting there and one of our instructors goes, OK, ladies and gentlemen, I need you to understand this about your job. You have about a six second life expectancy and a time of war um being calm, being in critical infrastructure and everything like that, you know, okay, whatever this guy is just trying to get one over on us and then, you know, 9 11 happens and you start realizing crab this might actually be true and then when you get into other mission sets, you definitely understand how important that all these parts and pieces come in. So that understanding that why I'm serving is a lot different after that moment. How did the service change for you? Minor I think from what you described things seemed kind of benign before. But then everybody started to rally and that was a

good thing, both in the community and in the unit and consumer, one of our flight chiefs talking and telling us how you were going to see a change, more appreciation for the local community and you did start to hear that more right people whenever they saw you out in uniform. Uh, you used the word sorrow. I felt the same thing star from my brothers and sisters and fellow Americans that who had been subjected to those attacks and I think the strongest thought that I had was how could anyone have the audacity to do that to us? Didn't they know who we were; didn't they know whom we were capable of? Right? And so, and so now there was this uh, kind of a united front that we were going to present, right? Definitely. There was a much more sense of purpose as a nation I think, you know, in those days leading after 11, everybody kind of took that punch. You know, some families, uh, more so than others. I know that we had family members in New York just a few blocks from the towers one and went all down and then you know that communication piece things getting shut down, especially in new york, the phone lines on the civilian side going, you know, bonkers, people trying to get ahold of people. Um, there was hours, almost a day before we could reach that those family members to find out that they were more safe. Right? And then, you know, all of those moments leading up, right? As you were watching on the TV, I was watching on TV and then you got back brief. Um, you're like, okay, it's going down. You see the fires, you see the news reports and things are just going crazy. And then the time when the tower started dropping, right, that's when you're like, oh my gosh, this has gone way farther than we could have ever expected. Who's ever seen him with things like this? Nobody. Right. And it's just, you know, all of that trying to compute that and what's that next step? Right? So for you in uniform and uniform and you and the civilian and what does this look like? And how do we kind of rally even further to make it? So I definitely, uh, look back at those times and wonder, you know, what would we do today if, if that happened again? But hopefully we never have to have to do that. So do you have any closing thoughts minor on, on this subject, you know, 9/11 is one of those things that I, I tried to file away. I certainly didn't experience as much trauma as other people did, but it's not something that we like to revisit. However, it has continued to have an influence on me and has motivated me to serve. And it's just something that I draw strength from and draw satisfaction from that. I still get to join with my brothers and sisters in uniform and be part of the service. Catch him okay. You can. So I think for me it's making sure we tell the story and now we have, we have new enlistees who weren't even born when that happened. So trying to um trying to get them to understand what happened and why it's so important to how we operate today can be challenging because they didn't experience. I mean I have Children Who were born just after 9 11 who can understand right and it's important that we don't forget and we can pass on the importance of what happened, not just what happened, but how we responded and rebounded and rebuilt also. No, I think that makes a great point. Right sir. The history of what we did and why we did it is important from when we go back to Billy Mitchell and the bringing on Air Force when we talk about do little raids. You know, that was under Army Air Corps when we talk about air power. Um and how the air force responds to the need of a nation. I think that post 9 11 is a good example of, you know, a moment where we saw something happen and we had to respond

appropriately from the airlift of getting resources in the country from shock and awe. Then the continuous support of air power throughout the whole campaign. Um there's a lot of lessons learned, right? There's a lot of things that we can be proud of as a nation and proud of as an air force based on this example. Now, no one wants to say that uh that was something that we needed to learn these things. Nobody wanted any of those things to happen or do we look at it with any kind of sense of unclear, but it's definitely when we look at it optimistically of the positives that came out of these moments, it's that ability to learn that ability to flex and prove that, you know, United States Air Force is the greatest airpower out there. Um, and look at what we did, we did this, we did that. Um, and I think that time that to our airman today is very key of, you know, whenever something arises, the Air force surprises with it with no matter if it's a terrorist action, whether it's uh, you know, warfare from nation to nation, the air force always steps up in the manages to execute the mission without flaw and were quite successful. And then even tie that into cyber right. You know, this is what we do here; this is how this happens and here how we've learned from all of these issues that have gone after it. So it's definitely an um good things to come out of a really, really bad situation. That's my thoughts. So that gentlemen, I really do appreciate your time today, thank you for sharing your stories. They are both unique, both insightful. Hopefully the Gladiators out there can reminisce as well with a positive, optimistic look of lessons learned. Um and then also understand that you know, we would look back on our lost brothers and sisters and take a moment to talk for them. That said Gladiators, we have a great day and remember stab your enemies in the face through cyberspace.