

## Ep. 75: Introducing the 50th Network Warfare Squadron

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Welcome to another episode of the Sword and Shield. I am Chief master Christopher Howard, 960th COG SEL, and today with me I have... Lieutenant Colonel Jeremy Leader. Lieutenant Colonel Eric Stride. Gentlemen, thank you for spending some time with me today. I'm really excited about the 50th Network Warfare Squadron and you two are the leaders. Right and there's no pun intended for you, sir. Well uh I would say that uh you know any unit will only have one leader at any given time. So I'm the outgoing, I just handed the flag over to Lieutenant Colonel stride last week. Welcome sir. Thank you. I'm excited to hear. That was it's a bittersweet moment. Uh great uh I would say it's been the highlight of my career being the Commander of the 50th Network Warfare Squadron. Seeing them go through a lot of changes. I have a really long history here at Lackland and Kelly Air Force Base doing uh basically an Opsec mission uh where they would listen to phone calls, listen to over radios for to hear what information different units are kind of putting out there that the enemy could sweep up. Uh And as technology has evolved, so has the mission, so now the majority of what we do is read emails and yes, we read your emails, The Big Brother is watching you. Yes, but we do it for a couple different reasons. Again. We have a mission where we look specifically at that Opsec posture and then we have other missions where we look at when people send passwords out into the open um kind of what does that do for our network security posture? So we definitely look at it from a cyber perspective nowadays. But I'll let you kind of colonel strike kind of talk a little bit more about even in the near future, there's some evolution uh mission. No. Absolutely. So you know, everybody's aware right 16th Air Force stood up just over two years ago now alright with the task of you know, moving forward uh information warfare in the Air Force's operational mission set, Right? So it's not just cyber by itself, it's not just Intel or e w or you know, space by itself, but it's really how do we integrate all of the different mediums the different mechanisms of warfare there to impact all the domains. Right? And have an I would say how to break down those stovepipes right? And make them interact and cross flow better. And so there are going to be opportunities for us within the 960th, within the 50th, to look at potential opportunities to evolve, to embrace new mission sets. Um and so the future isn't completely set yet. Right, I would say um you know, in my 19 years in the Air Force, right, the one thing that's been constant has been changed, right? So embracing that and looking at as an opportunity, right, should we be tasked to engage in a new mission set? Look at what opportunities that presents us to um improve our force, improve our effectiveness and our ability as a reserve force to

answer the needs of the regatta and of 16th their horse. And I'll just add really quickly that you mentioned change is the only constant. And with the new direction from uh-Chief step, the Air Force General Brown, you know, accelerate change or lose. So we're getting ready to put the pedal to the metal gotcha, right, I mean, but if you look at the history really, this is a mission of protection like info sec, Ops second and so forth. And I anticipate as we continue to go down the path with the 16th Air Force and through these mission sets am going to have some kind of degree of that lineage or heritage to it as well. Um just to enhance the mission one way or another. Right, correct. Yeah. The need for Opsec and info so it doesn't go away. So we'll find new ways to do it and within either combine it with different mission areas and or different expertise, but in different technologies. Again, technology is always evolving. So definitely take advantage of the things that the industry has to offer and uh we'll go wherever people are talking, that's where the mission goes. Right? So when people stop using email and start going to other mediums than we have to go to those mediums to do the opposite mission, right? And you know, even with change there is constant and constant really comes down to FCS and the personnel that do the job. So we talked about the 50th network warfare squadron. What FCS does your unit have? So today we are predominantly Intel heavy. Right? So on the enlisted side, one of those, we have a few in the senior positions or one in four is I think they're one and two is now correct. Um We also have some three D ones three years I guess technically what one Delta's uh November on the officer's side, 17 sierra's 14 November's. Right, so a very heavy Intel flavors right? With cyber uh in they're as well. Um and you know, again that change being constant, right? There is uh an opportunity for that to evolve as we figure out, you know, what does evolution of our mission look like? Right, so there will be opportunities for our troops to potentially cross train, pick up additional skill sets, right? Um embrace, you know, maybe specific missionaries that they didn't have a chance to before. Right? So you anticipate with cyber the cyber growth, right? We'll see some changes within the one delta seven fc. With the shred out changes over the next couple of years. Uh anticipate probably someone bravo for mixtures in there as well As all of this starts to combine and then as IW as a whole changes, I'm sure there will be more changes down the road when we talk about five and 10 years down the road. Um but like currently though, when we talk about the 50th, what is the day in the life look like? So if I were to start in your unit today as a brand new element, what would my day look like? So as I left, I would say we just uh we're still effectively in the global pandemic. So I would say the day in the life has changed dramatically in 2020, um how we in process people has changed quite a bit. Uh there are still a few members, I remember meeting for the first time, even though they've been in the unit for about six months because again, being able to do stuff virtually has definitely helped us out, but it still has its limitations. Um but uh but I will say again, a normal day in the life assuming that someone is in person and able to come in to do the weapons systems operation after they become mission qualified. Um uh typically the sword is broken down either 246-hour time frame. So they have pre mission run the story, then there's a bunch of post mission uh coalition. Yeah. Yeah. So again, so there's the mission would take up a good majority to three quarters of the day or so. So I actually get to put my hands on equipment. I actually get to do some job. Yes. So

keyboard. But then we also one of one of the capabilities we have is the radio frequency monitoring system. And that's uh pretty popular because again it gets people out in the field and they're actually do it monitoring a bunch of different a bunch of different signals, radio Zell mars. And they also have Wi-Fi sweepers and other things. So those that mission area that was actually one of the highest demand areas before Covid. Um And I foresee that that missions that will have a future again. You go you go where people are talking. So, right, that's where that's where the Michigan week, right. Love. R. F. Signals. And I definitely can see that when we talk about that mission set the protection piece, how that comes into play, right? When we're trying to get information out covertly different ways around sometimes at our signal is really the route. So having a good essay, situational awareness on what's going on is definitely going to be key distant leadership. And we talked about it for a second upset. That's awesome. Um you know, it sounds like it's a really cool atmosphere, real cool job. Be able to come in and be able to actually do some mission um When on U. T. A. But you know as a senior N. C. O. I always look at some of the intangible pieces like urban development and how do you how do you develop me as a leader? So what do you as a unit specifically do to develop your, Yeah okay I can again kind of go from what we've done in the past again the future um as leadership changes over and looking for different opportunities. I think there's always an all we always have an eye out there for the future but I would say being in San Antonio Texas here at JB. A. Um there's a ton of different opportunities for folks to either again grow within their career field at different units on the base and or to learn from those different experiences uh that we have within the unit. So again one uh for the one who knows um I'll say the C. D. A. Weapons system is very kind of nontraditional intel but we have given folks the opportunity to kind of hone and maintain their their intel chops doing intel briefs kind of filling in uh I want to say a nonstandard type O. S. S function Where they're they're giving uh you know cyber threat briefs to senior leadership even at the 16th Air Force um again, it's kind of not specific to the weapons system, but it allows them to kind of still maintain their fsc credentials and not lose uh kind of lose site of those core skills that they'll need when they become senior in cell phones . So I guess with that you guys work with the other units on some of the cross utilization and I'm moving around and given those opportunities and then um do you guys come together as an Intel community specifically um on a regular basis to kind of hone those skills because being non traditional, you know, I think that's always a concern. Am I going to lose or atrophy those skills? I would say, you know, there are still some silos of excellence with the Intel community and the cyber community. But the fact again that there's so many of those silos of excellence here on at the same base and same installation. So the 50th is actually getting ready to move physically move buildings in the next calendar year. And uh so we'll have an Intel unit upstairs from us that that will kind of epitomize that that cross flow, Right? So they're even if we're not uh you know, reassigning people, there's still the opportunity to do some like joint exercises or joint activities. Yeah. Right line of sight. I think that it's a little bit on one of the wings priorities right? To develop our airmen. And so Captain Shaw and the 54th and the team working that priority is looking at deliberate mechanisms that we can use to develop our airmen further. Right. And so they have a SharePoint site

now that includes what is over 200 different technical trainings for folks that are interested in that in that piece. But also trainings on even some of the processes that are necessary for, you know, us as citizen airman in order to do our basic admin pieces. So I think there's some opportunities for us to continue to mature that right to do that cross flow that information from the various units. Right. So you can teach what our sister squadrons are doing across the wing. And I think there's also the wing is taking a very deliberate look, the type, the types and quantity of exercises and different deployment opportunities that includes deploying place. Just the, the different opportunities that we create for folks as well. That's a key part of development on top of the, the c b t s. I mean, so see BTS is a good start. But we have to create the opportunities and the experiences for people to work together. Right? And then also just the environment that champions and fosters that development. Right. I mean a lot of times we can get stovepiped and focused on just very finite pieces of a mission or just one aspect. So, you know, if we can hear in the fact that we're getting leveraged at the pdc, we're looking at SharePoint sites, the fact that we're fostering that kind of relationship with other units. Um you know, I think that's exciting really. You know, if we're looking at coming to this, weighing this group and specifically your unit and into uh not to talk you out too much, but the incoming commander now is now current Commander Colonel Stride, Lieutenant Colonel strike. He's he comes with a ton of experience that uh that I didn't have and I think it will really prepare them for the future um as that change and that mission happens, the experiences that he's had with NSA and uh it's just a they're in good hands and that's I think a key part of that Progression as well. Well that makes me, you know, just really interested in what do we see as the future. I don't get an exclusive or some kind of little tidbit or nugget of uh what do you see the future of the 50th network with their spot? That's a great question. Right? So as Lieutenant Colonel Leader pointed out, right, the cd, a mission isn't going to go away. Right. But we may change how we present those forces and maybe even where we present those forces. Right? Um and so uh it's and that's probably going to mirror bit of the transformation that we're seeing within the 688th cyberspace wing on the rig outside. Right? So um if you if you take that as kind of an uh I'll say a flag on where the winds are blowing, right? There's a good chance that we take the cd a mission in the A. C. D. Mission. Right. The cyber defense analysis in the act of cyber defense mission and put those together just as the 6 88 wing has done. Um and with that said right, there is a significant need um with throughout the throughout the 9/60 for range support. Right? And so I'm gonna put a little teaser out there because the uh earlier this week at Air Force Reserve Command the roles and missions assessment team took a look at the range mission as a potential mission for the for the reserve and General Jensen hasn't given it his blessing. But literally every member of the R. Mat team gave a thumbs up vote to the reserve needs to do this mission. Right, so there's a possibility I'll leave it as a possibility pre decisional because General Jensen's got to bless it and then it ends up going to General Scobee and the comac. Right? The commander BCC uh General Kelly Wright who will then give the official approval should they determined that's where they want reserve support to be. Um and that would then most likely come in two forms supporting the active duty mission on the rig outside. But again we have over I want to say 250

ish today CMR operators within the 960th group on six different weapons systems. And uh and that number is only growing right. And so the ability to have a range for training for mission emulation, um you know, threat representative networks for TTP development for cruise certification is a real need for us within uh within the 9/60 and so a little bit of a teaser. But that is one potential area. Right at the end of the day we're going to go where we're recapping were 16th Air Force in a. C. C. Says, hey, you know, this is where we need the reserve component. Um and of course where Africa where Air Force reserve command is willing to invest. I'm going to be honest, you know, my energy is screaming with glee with the idea of this right? Um just a previous range experience and all of these other things like the fact that you know, we're looking at expansion, we're looking at opportunities whether that falls within the A realm of the 50th network for your first wedding or whatever. Um you know, just the idea that we're moving and progressive in cyber, just exciting for me. So um I guess, you know, at this point I really would like to give you guys an opportunity to, you know sell why an airman should come to this unit and be part of this unit. I think that we've done a really good job and I want to hear the pitch that the elevator pitch Well again, I don't think it's so much just, you know, when people know about what we do and you align it with other folks that have an inner geek as strong as yours, then I don't think there's much selling that needs to happen. It's just a matter of making people aware the opportunity and then uh and then getting them through all the administrative uh kind of pieces that it takes to get people either into the Air Force to begin with or from one unit to another. But we can work through that and I know that's one of the key areas that begin General Brown is kind of hit upon is the bureaucracy peace. And so we've already seen a lot of red tape cutting there so we can find a way or make one, right? And I think having a real no kidding mission that they're engaging on every, you know, uta weekend makes a difference, right? So if you're ready, check the numbers from the exit interviews from, you know, folks that are leaving the reserve. One of the biggest complaints we hear is lack of job satisfaction, right? Because many of them train, train, train, but then never execute. One of the benefits that we have here is that we're executing all the time, right? So you get that, you know that satisfaction of, hey, I'm No kidding doing real world mission here as a member of the 50th? I think that's important, definitely awesome. All right. Any parting words? I don't know, I just appreciate the time that you've given us and uh yeah I appreciate your time sir. Yeah, I really appreciate this opportunity. I want to thank Lieutenant Colonel leader for his, his leadership of the 50th for the last 3.5 years. I've been in the seat literally 10 days as of the date of this recording. And so I have been uh Taking it as much as I can in my arms wrapped around it and I'm really excited for what the future brings for the men and women of the 50th, awesome gentlemen, I appreciate your time. I appreciate your leadership. I look forward to uh seeing where your career head sir, I know that you're moving on to XP um so that that would be excited. I'm sure we'll end up having a conversation about wing XP. Look forward to seeing what you do with the uh the 50th sir and to all of our gladiators out there, appreciate your time. I appreciate your sacrifice everything that you do for your nation. It's greatly appreciated and always remember let's get out there and stab our enemies in the face through cyberspace.