

Ep. 79: Year in review

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Welcome to Sword and Shield podcast. I'm Colonel Rick carriage today. I'm joined by Samantha Mathison. I'm the 433rd public affairs specialist, but I also serve as liaison to the 960th Cyberspace Wing and do all sorts of P. A. Stuff for you know, this awesome wing. So thanks for joining us Sam and really not that you had much of a much of a vote, but I said, hey Sam, we're going to do this together and that's fine, that's fine. That's what I'm here for, is to help fill in where I can and help out. So it's kind of nice once in a while to get out from behind the screen and get in front of the microphone for sure. For sure and I certainly enjoy it every time I'm able to do. Yeah, that's excellent. So we wanted to kind of talk about I think well, you know, we're titling this kind of the annual year in review and talk about. Yeah, yeah, there were all sorts of craziness that happened this past year and all sorts of challenges and highlights to you. There were some amazing things I think members of the wing have done and I would love to sit here and chat with you about it, sir. Yeah, that's I'm really proud of a number of things we've done obviously the year started out and in a place we have not been before. And so it was pretty nuts. And that's pretty crazy trying to understand what that was happening. And then I'm kind of watching it unfold in front of her eyes at the capitol and the fallout from that. So I found that um interesting, I guess is the word that's really kind of the best word you can use honestly. Because yeah, that was completely unexpected. And then having to deal with, you know, the okay Air Force members, this is how you handle uh-political participation. You know, make sure you don't drag the Air Force into it, you know, make sure you're not in uniform. You know, I mean you are welcome to participate in political activities, but there does come a point where it becomes unacceptable, you know, So that was definitely an interesting challenge to think about and to explain to others and to understand, sure as we, as we walk through the fallout from that as an opportunity to educate people and kind of understand where people are coming from. And then we had some dialogue and I think um what at the end of the day, what we do about that situation is more important than the situation itself. And I felt like as an organization we moved forward with that. We had a number of discussions we had with people about what that means and it elicits a bunch of emotions and we're able to talk about that and kind of help people through and it kind of continued with our theme of connecting with their men and giving us opportunities um to talk about stuff in a way that is helpful for women to express their feelings where they're at with stuff. Yeah, for sure for sure. And you know, that was that was a difficult time and it was interesting which is you know, your word but I think that is the best the best descriptor for that. You know, there were cons there were but there were pros that came out of that too. A lot of other things

happened this this year, you know that I think that we should talk about and address. So sir, where do you want to start? Well, I think for me when I when I kind of put things in buckets and one is kind of things that happened external to the wing and then things that happen internal to the wing and as I think about this year and reflect, I know we're not done with the year but we're pretty close and so as I started thinking about it from the mission perspective 16 30 force laying out what the requirements are I think was really helpful as we work through that process of we want to be where 16 3rd force and A. C. C . Wants to be in that mission space and then um communicating that day Farsi and so a number of challenges back and forth and how that happened. But we're getting to a good spot. I feel like as we grow and mature the organization we've had some first so we had our first wing commander and we had our first command chief depart organization. So that was a historic moment as well. Throughout the year we continued with our leadership summits. I think that's really important for us to grow and mature as well as how we handle our internal leadership messaging and processes. Um Yeah so sorry to interrupt but I just I just wanted to say like I particularly enjoy the leadership summits you know just as you know just being there too as a watcher you know and that's mainly my function with that. You know I go and I take pictures and I talk to people while they're there and the atmosphere is always so positive and I know everyone there is always happy to be there and they are thrilled about the networking opportunities and the information they're learning and getting on the same page as a wing. You know is something that I've noticed people really enjoy with the leadership summit and I think that's a fantastic thing especially considering you know in this time of Covid 19 and the pandemic and dealing with all these restrictions with mass and you know, and also the vaccinations that have come out. So can I ask you sir, like um in regards to the vaccinations themselves, I think that has been something this wing has also felt challenged for and then also has overcome can we talk a little bit about that? Like what are your thoughts? Sure. Yeah. So let's put in context of leadership summit just to wrap that up to is I feel it's really important to get our people together because of how we're structured organizationally across the U. S. Where the units are, you know, geographically separated, how they have to kind of manage um mission and opportunities themselves, but to bring everybody together, they have that really discussions, put eyeballs on people. I think it's really important. So yeah, definitely as we continue to do that, um you know through Covid as well is trying to help each one of those units navigate, you know what's going on locally. Covid is very much local like politics um and try to help them from a policy perspective and help them understand where they have opportunity to move and how to do a mission, how to take care, airmen and their families and you know where men don't live and their families don't necessarily live near the base that they even drill at and sometimes I live closer to other organizations and so how do we message that and how do we handle um given their men what they need in order to navigate this really difficult time , I think is the one thing that I struggle with is the information flow and making sure people have what they need to make really good decisions for themselves and their family . I think we did a good job of that. I have got some feedback about that. It's certainly not perfect and not. Yeah. And it never is. Information and communication is one of the most difficult things as a public affairs

expert. I know this for a fact. There are so many times people come in and I'm like, hey, did you hear about this? You know, we've been broadcasting this for a while and they're like, wait, what, what's going on? I'm like, uh, and so as we as we try to make sure they try to filter some of the sausage making on the policy and just give them a final here's where we go. And um, I think having people in place to talk about that and as we go, you know, through Covid and as at the end of the year here, as we moved into the vaccination process and the exemptions and accommodations, it's been a real challenge from an information standpoint, but I'm really proud of how we've come out of it Right now, we're the number one vaccinated wing in 10th Air Force. Nice. I didn't know that that's awesome. So we're doing really well there. Um and then also I think um we haven't had a lot of issues that I'm aware of just outright refusal and people felt like they're able to talk about their concerns and we provided them an opportunity to express themselves in that way. To me. That's really important is that we treat people with dignity, respect and give them the options that they have to do what they need to do with their life. Yeah, the vaccination mandate and processes has definitely been tough. But I think for the most part, you know, this wing has done very well with, you know, the messaging and this is just my personal opinion. I'm not talking on behalf of anybody. But yeah, I just felt like it's gone very, very well considering these things. We tried really hard and I know we've missed the boat on some things. But how you can do is keep trying, right? Just keep grinding. You make mistakes, you, you know, hold yourself accountable and then you try to fix them and then you move on. We haven't had a pandemic in this country for 100 years. And so I wasn't around then and so trying to figure out what that looks like. And even today it's much different than it was 100 years ago. And so um hopefully we don't have to deal with, deal with this again, But I think all of our leaders and I tell all of our leaders in the units um When this is over five years, 10 years from now, however long it takes it takes, you're gonna look back at this and go, wow, like we did something really historic. Like we're able to continue mission, take care of roman, take care of their families and continue to navigate this space where the unknown uncertainty and so I'm proud of that. And um certainly it's not been a normal command tour in the sense of command tours for any of our leaders um in the units there. So we'll be happy in 22. Hopefully you can put Covid behind us and we can, you know, I'm looking forward to. I think we said this a year ago to that we're looking forward to 21 being the year. We would put it behind us too. But you know what we'll do, all we can do is just keep open and like you said, keep moving forward. So absolutely. So what else has happened this past year annoying? I mean we talk about our third birthday, we had a birthday party. Yeah, we had our third birthday. Um and so we're moving into toddler stage as a wing. So that's really exciting. Um we stood up a wing plans office here at the end of the year and so we're growing and maturing into the wing we want to be um and we're kind of controlling the pace necessarily. There's more things that we'd like to do but based on the environment we're in and money and everything else that we are really taking a deliberate approach to maturing and building our wing and um you know I tell my recognition partners that whatever they do in the time it takes them to do it's going to take us twice as long as reserve. Yeah of course. Yeah. Community. We got the TRS that only come in you know once a month and then now with the budget and

financial difficulties that are happening. You know we're having to um do a lot with a little you know which of course being military we tend to make that happen. But yeah it's hard right? We do it on the back-story airman we really do. And so I just was at the 60th on a visit unit visit a 60 cog. And um and just told them like we need to make lists of things that we're not going to do. Like we can't continue to do everything that we're asked to do. We need to make smart risk based decisions on the things we're not going to do. And so we started to shift that messaging. But Sam I think the 11 so there's two really important things I think that happened last year to wrap up 21 that I'm really proud of and um one is our UEI so we got through our first unit effectiveness inspection. Um Not without any scar tissue but I think it's an inspection right? I think we have to do it right. Like we drew a chalk mark in the sand and said hey this is where we are. This is the thing that we need to work on. These are things you're doing great. I think a number of things we're doing really well. Obviously there's some areas are still working on, we're still growing maturing. We're still hiring the first person of everything in the wing and so that's been difficult um to kind of walk through and explain why we are where we are when they put the same level of expect that if our CG A. F. R. C. I. G. Easy for me to say puts the same level expectation on us as they do. The 433rd who's been around 50 years, like you have 433rd has a bunch of institutional knowledge and just business processes and practices are refined and efficient and people understand those who are and everybody's on the same patch of ground or with us. It's really different. I think the I. G. Teams struggle with that. You know the headquarters struggled with understanding how to measure us how to validate that but what came out of it was rapid improvement event that's going to define the way we do that in the future. I'm really excited about that because it sets us on the next path for the next inspection cycle. Yeah I mean inspections I mean they're very frustrating and they're extremely stressful. You know however the good that comes out of it is you know your weaknesses and that's important. You know if you don't know your weaknesses you don't know where to improve. And I think it's important to know like as a wing as a professional organization to know where your weaknesses are at just so you can highlight those areas and then focus on them to put you know make them better and just be better in the future. And considering that this wing is only three years old a little over three years old. Um I think you know this is a fully established wing for the most part there are some issues obviously because it is so young but considering where it's at and what's been happening and what's been going on recently and the you know in the external world I mean this is uh it's a good wing to be at you know and the culture is really good too. I personally really enjoyed uh coming over here and working with 9/60 even though it's not as um uh as established I'll put it like that as the 4 30 experience as experienced. You know everyone over here just always has a good attitude, good culture and um the morale is always very high even though it's, you know, there are a lot of frustration. So sure, yeah, I think we uh we talk about building that culture and you do it through people and so you hire the right people, give them the space they need. Well, most of the time, the resources they need, right? Because money, money's resources, there's never enough people, never enough money. Um but we give them good direction, intent and just let them go figure it out. And then I think um certainly that validated in my mind that we're

on the right path, we're on a good path, and we're on a good maturity level. Um you know, you know, our CCo the Bud, he has to submit a recorder where we are from a maturity perspective and we are right on track of where we should be. So, you know, I'm proud of that fact and I think the one other big event that happened last year I'm really proud of is our first annual mental health resiliency fair. Yes. Yes, So that definitely turned into a way bigger deal than I certainly expected. I showed up to take pictures and there were so many people there, like Francis Martinez did an amazing job putting that together. I don't know how she did it, but especially during Covid, right? We really didn't know what to expect, what we're going to get. Um I think we probably could have filled the auditorium had had we been allowed to under Covid, you know, and so really great event. Really looking forward to how that's going to spin into year two. I know she's planning some great things and I told her, hey, you got to raise the bar, we're going to go one more. I don't know how she's going to do it, but I know she will. She's got a plan. Yeah, we got a plan. So, um, I think taking care of her airman, we did a good job of that. You know, that's our first priority. Our second priority is optimized readiness. Obviously very difficult under Covid keeping people individually ready and unit ready. But we worked really hard on that. Um, We're actually doing really well. We're above the standard for uh, for medical readiness. So we're above 80% as a wing. And so coming out of Covid really proud of that fact that we did really well there. And then a third with maturing the organization and we kind of talked about those things already were doing so really proud of what we're doing. We're going to continue to keep those as our priorities going into 22 during my reign of terror. And so that will still be where we're focused and we'll be doing some other things in there and taking the next step under each one of those priorities, um, going forward here. So what is the next step? Great question? There's a number of next steps a number of things that, you know, we definitely need to work on. Um and so for me, I want to continue to build good business practices and repeatable makeable processes that outlive you and us, we're all going to move on at some point. We must hand this thing over to the next generation and they shouldn't have to work on the same problems that we've been struggling working. So travel vouchers still continues to be something that we need to focus on systematically. Yeah, I know, and it's just ridiculous with a travel voucher issue. You know, I mean, it's just, I mean, you know, I could go into it, but let's not, it's a monster. Let's just say that we can continue to try to solve the systematic problem to help ironman. And I think we've made some, just in the past month, we've made some breakthroughs that we haven't had before. So, um and that's been the support for 33rd has done a good job that I hired somebody over there that's really helping us understand the process. So I'm really good with that. Again, people solving problems, um continue to connect with our families and our airmen understand where they're at understand what their needs are. Tent Air forces asked us to experiment with a kind of a new model of how we support our airmen and do it based on where you live and not based on your unit. And so we're going to try to identify where people live and then connect the people where they live, even if it's outside of our organization to create a community of support. So if you drill in San Antonio, but you live in Great Falls Montana, we have somebody that lives there. Um, how can we help her with that community and connect with people

there to get resource that her family needs like. So it's a different concept. So we're gonna experiment with that, try to figure out what it means and then share any lessons learned with the command on that. So, so honestly I think this is the perfect unit to even experiment that on with all the amount of GSU's we have around anyway regardless most people live near or around their location, but not all of them. So I think that's an excellent idea to try to push forward on. I don't know how it's gonna work out, but I don't know either, But we're all in and so we're working on finding some software and using data to understand how people live and try to use some analytics and really be deliberate and thoughtful about how we approach it. Yeah, well that's pretty sweet. That's pretty exciting that we want to continue to grow our diversity inclusion equity program. I mean, um, there's so many things that we need to continue to improve on and as you look across our units were in places around the country. All different types of places with different demographics and each one of those units need to be reaching out to increasing you know their diversity at their organization. Which then makes it a little bit easier for us as a way because we're more diverse just because people are out in different parts of the country already. And so I think we do we do better than most here but certainly we're nowhere near where we need to be continuing to focus on that. From a readiness perspective I'm really excited about where we're going there. The next steps are going to take. We're gonna use the I. G. Processes and work with our mission partners to help understand hey cyber readiness is different and so if we're in if you're in a cyber unit your readiness is different. Your requirements should be different. We shouldn't try to box everybody in the same box your readiness. Um If you're going to be a deploying garrison person you're going to come to your building where you do drill and that's where you'll be deployed and mobilized. Like there's probably some efficiency there of not making everybody go through the same training that combat commerce has to go through. Yeah. Yeah that makes sense. And so we're working on that. I think there's a way to help us do that were probably more ready than we're reporting just because some of those things wouldn't matter to somebody that's deployed in garrison so we're going to communicate that We're going to report it differently. Um we're building those processes and we're going to be kind of the lead for the three-cyber wings in the air force about how that happens. And we'll bring the 668 and 67th along with us as we do that for the air force. Obviously we need to continue training inefficiency. We got to get better how we do that. I think we need to take better advantage of the waiver process when you hire new people. If they have a background in I. T. And cyber then do we really have to send them to every single school? And where can we take a risk? And um where should we invest the limited amount of funds and getting people the training they need. That's pretty important you know because streamlining things will save the Air Force a lot of money to and obviously money is always an issue so there's never enough money no matter what year we're in, nope there never is. So we got to get more efficient there and I think there's room for that and we got some folks working on that and then execute the mission. Um this is exciting as well because we're really working hard on how we present our forces. And so in cyber the community, the larger Air force cyber community has um we're just kind of building this thing as we're going right? We're building the airplane as

we're flying it as they say. And so we present cruise and we got different crew ratios and each cyber weapons system looks at a little differently. Um, the combat COM uses UTC s and it's very clear and they know what to expect and you know, how many people are in this UTC, what equipment goes with it. We've got to get to that level of fidelity with their cyber units and then we can understand the capabilities we have and then present those two combatant commanders and therefore saying this is what we can do for you, this is how you access us and I think it's a maturity thing. Um and there's only three-cyber link, so we're all trying to figure it out together. Yeah, well, cyber is just in general, in the Air Forces is fairly new. So, you know, we're breaking new ground here with how everything is going to work and how the mission is going to be accomplished. And Like even like every time I turn around and come over here to the 1960s, I hear something new and different that's being done as opposed to regular air force or regular reserve wing wings and units, you know, like this wing, like those things just so differently because the requirements are so different, you know, so we get that space that we have that space too. Um choose my words wisely to figure out what's going to work right? And so are regular partners are leading us to do that, giving us a space to help. And they've been really good with being involved along the process and giving us feedback. So I'm excited about that, how we normalize some of those things that's um that's really going to set up, you know, the next leadership team for the wing to take it to the next step from there. Yeah. Because with all this being new and different, you know, this is going to be a lasting legacy. I mean it really is everything that we're doing right now is going to carry forward into the future and someday some future leader of the of the 19 sixties cyberspace wing is going to be looking back at Colonel Erredge's biography, you know, and thinking like dang, he did a good job. I was going to say why the heck did he do that? Why would he what decision was that made? Hopefully that's not, hopefully it's not. Um but you know, that's what we're trying to do. We're trying to, we're trying to make the wing um put the wing in a position to be successful in the future and postured what, you know, if we were going to project ourselves and time machine Sam and rick to a year from now. Um I think we'd be talking about, hey, the wing looks a little bit different, like we're having some movement, and we're going to stand up a range squadron. So to support the Air force cyber ranges, so that's going to be super exciting. That is exciting. So that'll probably get approved this year and we'll start moving out towards that. We're going to have our second mental health resiliency fair and so Mr. Kevin Hines is going to come in and if you don't know his story, I encourage you just to Google and, and we, I think we're working on some other media to and support of that as well. So I'm excited for that. Um I think one thing you can hang your hat on is that we're going to continue to budget uncertainty. Yes. Yeah. Well that's a constant sir, like in the almost 20 years I've been in, that's every year, that's an issue or topic of conversation every year. It feels like it's worse than last year, but I don't know if it is, I don't know if it is, it's kind of come about to being the norm at this point. Um, but obviously that that impacts our ability to make good decisions on what we do and kind of slows us down. We're going to have two more leadership summits. The first one is going to be at the 35th combat calm in the spring. So looking forward to that, getting to some combat calm experience and then it will, the

next one in the fall will be back here in San Antonio. So I'm looking forward to that . Um, undoubtedly there's going to be transitions. There always is in the military and so we'll probably have some, some different leadership transitions and different organizations. We've already hired a couple here lately and we, we know we have a couple of folks going to school in the summer. So we know we're going to have some more folks as well. So great opportunities to have new leaders come in and put their stamp on their organization. Yeah. Which is good because it's really important to mature this organization because as we said earlier, it's only a little over three years old and things are going to constantly change and keep changing well with that being said, sir, do you want to talk about the changes in the public affairs like this podcast or should we leave that alone? No. So let's, yeah, let's talk about that. Um, and then uh, and then, and then I'll give a wrap up. Um we have done to my account Sam 46, not including this 1, 46 episodes been published this year. That is awesome. Like it's been one a week. That's one a week and it's been a grind, but I appreciate your efforts. Um some are better than others. We know that we get good feedback. Keep the feedback common. We want to talk about the things that, that you all want to hear from us and talk about it, but we're gonna take a bit of a different direction with 2022. And so we're going to go to a month at this point. And then if, you know, if we decide we want to change it up, we'll do that too. And so we're looking at doing maybe some other things as well to supplement how we communicate with their airmen as well. Um so that that's kind of the plan for going in next year and as we continue to grow our relationship before 33rd, right, there might be somebody else sitting in this seat being our podcast producer, Executive director. Yes sir. We're, we're looking at me and another individual in the 433rd public affairs office to switch positions. So on the military side I promoted as you know, and what that means is now I'm taking on different duties and responsibilities over there. And so as a result I am unfortunately going to have to hand over my baby, which is this podcast over to someone else and it hurts me a little bit to have to do that. I'm not going to lie this. Like I said, this has been my baby for the last couple of years and um I watched it grow from little Bean to now it's, you know, full fledged, you know, little bird, I guess leaving the coop, we're leaving the chicken coop or leaving the nest. You've done an amazing job, you always are the number one podcaster in my heart and you, you've, you've pushed us to get out of our comfort zone and do this. I still remember the first episode. I'm like, man, what are we doing? This is awkward and uncomfortable, literally just winging it. And it was honestly, sir, I was highly amused by that because I really did. It was you and Chief Howard. We, you know, barely had the, the outline of a plan and you all just sat down and just started talking back and forth and I'm just sitting here watching you all like this is great. It worked out okay and it's been fun. And then hopefully our listeners have gotten some out of every episode that they listened to, like that's what we want. Like, um, take something out that that and then you can hang your hat on and that you can um, say that it's worth your time to listen to most definitely. Well sir, we're almost out of time. So I wanted to ask you, is there anything that we missed that we should talk about and then the ball is in your court for, for wrapping up this. Sure, I think again, thanks for, for all the hard work that you put in this and make it what it is and thank you. Um, I really appreciate that. And the, and the team and um, and, and certainly it

just takes some coaxing to get some folks to get behind the microphone and talk to. So I appreciate your positive attitude and energy that have encouraged people to do that. So I think leaving um going into 22 here, I think we need to keep an eye on national defense strategy and from a mission perspective, we're definitely going to see a different focus for the new NDS and we expect to get that in the early part of 22. Um we're going to shift to more of indo pacific focus is my expectation from what I'm hearing, what's going to look like and how we do that in our wing. We're just going to have to figure it out and see what our mission partner needs from us and whether Quebec and command needs for us to help out. And we'll do that in a very deliberate, we'll make deliberate process, will make good decisions and I'll do that. And um we're here to support where they needed to where the air force needs us to do. We will provide, you know, combat ready airmen to dominate cyberspace and that's what we're going to continue to do no matter who the adversary who the threat is or what situation is. We'll be ready to do that. So, and I believe it, I really do. All right, Sam well thanks again and I appreciate everything that you've done for the team and us and I appreciate being here. So all right