

00:00:05,270 --> 00:00:07,048 the Air Force has announced the creation of a new information operations , technical training school . Air Force Basic military training has an updated curriculum with a new focus on readiness and lethality . The first Command , the Air Force starts here . Hey everybody welcome into the Air Force starts here and thanks for the subscribe stream or download however you might be listening in if you get a chance to throw us a star , hopefully five stars , we certainly would appreciate that as well . My name is Dan Hawkins from the Air Education and Training Command public Affairs team and your host for this professional development podcast dedicated to bringing Total Force Big a Airmen insight tips , tricks and lessons learned from the recruiting training and education world . Episode 60 for the podcast today and that's a good one . It features Captain Ashley Bird , an instructor pilot at the 71st Flying Training wing Advanced Air Force Base Oklahoma and I ran across Ashley's story because of our joint connection to Purdue University where she graduated from the ROTC program before commissioning . And I really was just intrigued by her philosophies and and personal journey to the Air Force and that includes the path she took to ROTC in general and learning to fly while she was in college . And now after she graduated from specialized undergraduate pilot training , she's now a part of that much heralded faith mafia , which is what the first assignment , instructor pilots are called . So we're going to spend some time talking about her daily life as an instructor pilot . The pros and cons of being a force generator and balancing your work life with being married to another military member as well . We'll also spend some time discussing their thoughts on rated diversity improvement . General Brown , our Air Force Chief of Staff has said that to remain the most capable force , we must have rated officers and leaders with diverse backgrounds , experiences and thoughts who can see the challenges from different perspectives and rated diversity improvement ties directly to see satisfaction airman and is a focused long term effort to attract recruit , develop and retain a diverse rated leadership core through deliberate efforts to raise awareness about aviation career opportunities , develop strategic partnerships and remove potential barriers to service while at the same time mentoring current aviators . So a lot to talk about with Captain Bird and she goes through all of it so seamlessly . So let's get to it . Episode 60 for the Air Force starts here , launches right now . Ashley , tell us a little bit about yourself . Yeah , so I'm actually Bird born and raised in Indianapolis indiana . I have a younger brother and he actually is now materials management at Robins Air Force Base in Georgia . He's enlisted there but I went to Purdue University , I majored in prelaw , did the boiler up uh went through the ROTC program there while I was at Purdue , I was also in a sorority kappa kappa gamma . So it's kind of dual hatting it along with the Bachelor's degree which was very , very cool and ended up doing the gold bar recruiter program in new york city for about 10 months in which they pulled me out a little bit early to come in a complete pilot training here at Vance Air Force Base , went through T six is uh then T 30 eight's and went to uh pilot instructor training down at san Antonio at Randolph for about 3.5 months and came back here and have been an instructor for the past two years wow so a lot to unpack there . So I kind of wanted to go all the way back to the beginning and and talk about you know what kind of maybe got you hooked into aviation and potentially a career in the military . Uh You know I did read that your your dad was a black hawk pilot so I'm sure that had to play a factor but but what what got you hooked into this line of work ? Yeah so to be brutally honest with you nothing . Um My mom is a special agent with the FBI . She did that for 27 years and recently retired about five ish years ago my dad

was a ROTC grad from indiana University , went through ROTC , got to be a captain and then reverted to chief warrant officer . He's now a C . W . Five in the army . Um And he flies black hawks as an instructor pilot . He's been deployed five times throughout my life but um that was not at first riveting to me , I did not want to be away from family for that long . And growing up I had always wanted to follow my mom's footsteps as an FBI agent . So growing up I had written books as like about fifth grade and made all the pictures of me being an FBI agent and all that kind of good stuff . But that was kind of the route that I wanted to go to which is why even majored in prelaw . Um I thought that that would be more interesting for the FBI folks that would review my package and all that kind of good stuff . So growing up my mom told me that the best way to get to be in the FBI was to join the military . My dad said don't go army go air force . So so uh that's honestly that's why the air force , I feel like a lot of my life is just kind of um happened on a wins which is crazy to even think about but uh joined ROTC because my mom and dad told me that was the best path forward to be in the FBI . So I started ROTC my freshman year , my very first semester um And I'm not gonna lie to you , I did not have fun . I did not like it . It was a um Jurassic change from kind of just the normal civilian life to the more of the military um structure . So I came back after my first semester and my mom and dad . No way in heck am I going back to that ? I did not want to do it . And my mom and dad said just give it , give it one more shot . Ironically enough I came back the next semester and I was offered a type two scholarship um a high school scholarship from my detachment commander which basically paid for my schooling . My parents still had to pay for . Um and I had to pay for my housing . But the type two scholarship from ROTC program paid for my schooling entirely . So I figured I would just continue on with it and and just see what happens . That allowed me to basically have one more semester to figure out this was you know what I wanted to do with my life . Um That second semester I fell in love with the program that people were incredible . The instructors were amazing and always wanted you just to be the best version that you could be and they were also training us to be the best officers we could be once we graduated and talk about that . I'm curious . You know , and I know we're going to jump ahead to be an instructor pilot but I am curious , you know how much their influence while you're in ROTC ultimately ends up fast forward a couple years in urine instructor , you know motivating and inspiring . I'm sure you think back to those times . Yeah . No I I absolutely do and I think my parents first , I was very lucky . My mom and dad were very encouraging and everything that I wanted to do and believe it or not . Um My mom and dad when I told them that I wanted to apply to do the gold bar recruiter program . They were both like you shouldn't do that , you should just go ahead and just go to pilot training . Um get pilot training under your belt and move on to the next thing . And um I didn't want , I didn't want to , I wanted to go and live in new york city and recruit and I think that the gold bar recruiter program truthfully was kind of where I realized how important it was to not only get um people and parents to , to really encourage their , I don't know their students , their kids , their grandkids , whoever it may be that the military is an awesome place to be . Um and we really do all encourage other to be the best people that we can be and to go further on in our lives and just the military , right ? All the jobs that we have are also on the civilian sector as well . Yeah . And so I read too and I found I just found it fascinating that you actually found time to do this . But while you were in college and in ROTC you still took the time to get your private pilot's license . How did that come about ? Yeah , so Purdue has an awesome aviation program there . And uh

again funny enough , um , being a pilot initially was not what I wanted to do . My mom and dad were like , hey , because you got this scholarship , we had some , some extra money left over from what we had been saving for you and if you want to do this you can . And I originally I didn't , but then I had realized that I had extra elective credits that I needed to do . And so I used all my elective credits on my second semester of freshman year to go and get my private pilot's license . So I did it through Purdue and it was such an awesome experience being able to fly and all that kind of stuff literally for school . So it sounds like from day one of ROTC to the end of that first year , I mean you did like a complete 180 . Yeah , 1,000% . That's , that's so cool . And it's so cool to , you know , understand the influence those force generators had , you know , on you as a student in college . You weren't even in the military yet . So that's really awesome . And , and so you talked about being a gold bar recruiter . Um , what's the top line message that you kind of remember from your time as being a gold bar recruiter and why , you know , um , you know , why is service in the military a really good option uh for for young people , you know looking to come out of college ? I think that the military provides a really awesome stepping stone to not only gain experience exposure and education but it also has the most awesome benefits right tricore and all those types of things . Um but it's an awesome stepping stepping stone that you get to have people around you that support you and even if you choose to get out after four years , the civilian sector looks at military experience extremely high . I mean even just going back to what my mom had mentioned um if you want to be the FBI go in the military . Yeah so lots of things happening , you end up coming and joining the Air force after your gold bar time is over and and not really joining the Air Force but joining uh specialized undergraduate pilot training and you go through that experience , you know what's the 32nd elevator pitch , How was your time in S . U . P . T . And did you want to be a fake when you came out ? Yeah definitely . So I will preface this with the experience that I went through is different than the experience that we have now I went through a legacy syllabus um which is pretty much comprised of T . Sixes and then T 38 or T one and then you get your wings and you are now a winged aviator and you can go fly um set aircraft now . Um students are getting wind after T . Sixes and they will still continue to go on the follow on in T . One or T . 30 eight's . Um It's just the winning a little bit different in the program is just a little bit different . But um I had the most positive experience in T . Six is I went through the eighth flying Training squadron back in 2019 and I love the T . Six . Everything from uh contact where we did aero maneuvers and flips and twists and all that kind of good stuff in the air to formation , flying with two aircraft side by side uh to instrument navigation , flying in the clouds . Um I had the most amazing experience in in T . Six is I was fortunate enough to be uh in the top half of my class and I went on to fly T . 30 eight's and T . 30 eight's boy does not fly like the T . Six . Um But it is also , it's a powerful um dual engine aircraft and the instructors in the in the 25th flying Training Squadron here . Advance were also incredible and um it was by far the hardest year of my life um Both physically mentally , emotionally spiritually . Um There's a lot going on right , we're fresh out of college , we're trying to just figure out our way through uh the world but you're also trying to you know have a significant other make that work , maybe it's marriage , maybe it's dating . Um But then also trying to focus on your career and recognizing that every single flight matters , every single test that you take matters um the most hard here in my life but boy was it rewarding and yeah uh Faith was very high on my list . Uh Out of t 30 eight's you rank every aircraft in the Air

Force's inventory . So I think when I went through we ranked about 49 aircraft or so . Uh and I had faith number five . Okay . Alright . So you talked a little bit about the resilience aspect and how being in undergraduate pilot training um tested . Uh you know you on just about every level but talk about that from being dual military . Your husband is actually a pilot and you mentioned off air that he's going to be an a 10 pilot , how is that aspect of your life and how have you been able to balance that ? So . I graduated a year ahead of him and so while I was going through pilot training he was finishing up his bachelor's degree at Purdue University as well . When he finished in december he came out to Enid America to live with me for nine months because he was waiting to interactive duty . So he was just kind of sitting here and just waiting to start , so he ended up getting a job at academy sports which is kind of like a dick's sporting goods here and good old Enid and uh he was , I mean if you will , the housewife essentially , he cooked , he cleaned , he made my lunch , you made my breakfast and dinner and all of that kind of stuff while I was basically going through pilot training . Um the pro of having an individual or a spouse that understands the military side as they understand how busy it can be . Um He not a single time , would he ever asked me to stop studying or hey , I need to spend time with you or I need this or that he was very understanding um which I really , really appreciate . Um Now on the flip side when he's going through pilot training and I am an instructor , I was a little bit more needy , I needed , I needed time , I needed him to pay attention to me . Um but you know , it's it's been awesome and it's been good and it's challenging right ? Because now he's , he left , he graduated pilot training back in May and uh he's been gone since he went through uh introduction to fight fighter fundamentals at columbus Air Force Base for about 3 , 3.5 ish months . Um He came back for a week and now he's a seer where he's going to go in basically get tested and you know , emotional levels . Um So it's it's difficult , especially when he gets back from that , he's leaving to Davis Mountain in middle of november permanently , he'll be pcs in there uh for the start of the course which will be about six months so it's gonna be challenging but I think we were able to kind of get over the challenge because we both know at the end of the day uh there is going we are going to be together and we both just support our end goals for each other so much um that we've been able to make it work , wow I mean it's a lot right when you live in the same house and you don't have those stressors um you know any relationship can be tough but but to manage all that obviously he's a keeper so so I wanted to kind of transition into you graduate , you put fake number five on your list and voila you're a fe pop um So what is the daily life of an instructor , you know learning how to instruct and I know now you P . T . 2.5 is it's not really a new thing anymore , it's actually that's just the way we train pilots now . Um So mentorship of students um you know what is the daily life for Ashley bird ? Yeah I think um for myself and really everybody every day is extremely different so as an instructor pilot , our primary goal is to train and create Aviators um and we we have a high standard to which those are made and I think that the 2.5 program does an amazing job at creating amazing aviators . But for me my secondary job is I'm the executive officer of the 33rd Flying Training Squadron . So I'm essentially a paper pusher . I do awards , decorations , officer performance reports and pretty much any other tasks at the commander needs handled . I handle all of those . It's the faith life is interesting because essentially you're taking you know old joe Schmo off the street and you're having them go fly this D . A . 20 for you know 15 20 hours and they come to T . Sixes and they get about 80 90 hours and then they go on to the T .

38 or the T . One . They get another 80 hours or so . And then all of a sudden they can go to pilot instructor training and they can become an instructor with essentially less than 200 hours . It's it's you know a crazy thought but boy is it cool because um you know we get to gain airmanship and officership . I would argue faster than individuals that move on to mobility , Air force or combat Air force . Um It's it's a really really neat thing . Plus you guys get to fly in that cool T six flagship . Right ? Oh yeah that thing seems really I want to fly in that thing . It is neat and ironically a shape here designed that . So do you guys have like a secret fate mafia handshake . I think everybody wants to know that too . We do not , but we do have a super secret fate mafia slack . Oh , okay . Alright . You know that the super secret hand it's for , you know , people of maybe my older generation , you know , you guys have slack channel . Got it , got it . I'm gonna have to go home and ask my son what the slack channel is . No , that's that's really cool . And you know , you , you talked about it being cool and you know , in a T . C . You know , to develop the airmen , we need , you know , in line with the commands , priorities and advanced force development , you know , valuing force generators is , is obviously a top priority for the command . You know what , what are some of the things that either you were surprised about like that from a value proposition for being a force generator or you know , maybe , you know , challenging wise like , wow , I didn't know it was gonna be this hard like , you know , can you kind of maybe talk to that ? Yeah , it's funny . I was just telling cast before we started this podcast that when I was a student , I was going through and I would go home to my husband and be like , I just the I PS don't get it . They don't get what it's like to be a student , how difficult it is and to come home every single night and study and go through all of these publications and try to memorize and be able to regurgitate the next day all of these things for our flight , you know later that day they don't get it . And now sitting in this seat I kind of laugh at myself because I do get it and it is hard and you know , I'm not gonna say that being an I . P . Is any more difficult than being a student because it's not it's just different . It's a lot more things on our plate , right ? A lot more things to have to worry about . Um Now we're not just focused on being a pilot , we're focusing on being an officer as well the minute you graduate pilot training , so you know things to you know fill an opr and and try to be the best volunteer , try to be the best innovator , try to be that high time flyer . Um There's a lot that we're also thinking about other than just flying now . Yeah . Has there been a moment ? I don't want to say an aha moment but where you know you you left you know the job and said man I got I really love this job actually . Yeah . Um It happened about two months ago , one of my former students um I flew with him a good handful here in T . Six is when I was a schedule . Er and uh he he left he went on and went to go fly on the T . 38 back to the T . 38 program dropped F . 22 he got back from and also I F f . Um and he came back to my office , knocked on the door and um just said ma'am I would not be wearing without you and I just wanted to thank you . Um I've had a couple of those in the past six months and those moments are what makes everything worth it . Yeah and it kind of takes me back to that conversation we had at the top about your instructors at ROTC and how they really kind of brought you around and and now you're doing that that you know for other you know people that's really awesome . So so cool . Um I did want to talk a little bit about rated diversity improvement and you know your comments in the article about being a role model and inspiring the next generation of aviators . And you mentioned that your Air force role model was Major General Jeannie Leavitt , can you uh maybe speak to why that is . Yeah so I

actually met her when I was a Gold Bar recruiter back in new york . And she I only I only had about three or four hours with her but I told her upon my completion of Gold Bar recruiting that I was going to go on advance and start pilot training . And she awarded me the opportunity to go to shire for space and fly with the tigers in the F . 16 . So I logged about like a 1.3 or four or something like that over there and um she was just talking about all of our times in the Strike Eagle and first to only talk to a general for two hours and for her to hop through all of these hoops to get me a flight like who am I right . I was a second lieutenant and I want to be fighter pilot one day . But for her to make that happen really stood out to me , but I've actually , I'm in contact with her um ever every now and again and I talked to her throughout the past couple of years and her story is truly inspiring . She was also joined spouse . Her and her husband were both in the military and they ended up having this selected career whose career at that time was going to be put ahead and they chose hers . But you know , made major General Leavitt is a mother , an officer , a pilot , she is everything that I want to be the way that she presents herself , the way that she argues and represents the females , both in and out of the military , I want to be exactly like her . So maybe in a year , I'll get to do that . So so you know , speaking of rated diversity and you know , I mean the stats are what the stats are . I mean , you know , that's an area of improvement , that the Air force knows it needs to make General Brown our chief of Staff signed off last year on the rated diversity improvement strategy . But you also kind of talked about going to air shows and you know , seeing young girls or even parents that said , hey , I didn't even know , you know , girls could fly in the Air Force . How do you see ? Uh not just you , but you know , all um you know , whether it be women or minorities , you know , your role in rated diversity , It's important , It's very important . Um you know , I'll tell you even just going through the past year , I've been here for two years , even just within the past year , I see an influx of more and more minorities um coming through at least advance . Uh and it's it's awesome . It's really , really cool to see that actually , I was at an air show and uh it wasn't a female air show , it was just an air show for the public . And um myself and in , my counterpart were standing there in front of the T six and talking about the T six and pilot training and all that kind of stuff . And uh this little girl was kind of pointing at myself and Jamie , who who I was with and she was like , like mom , like those are pilots , like their girls and the mom walked over and she , you know , said to me that I was just dumbfounded , She was like , I didn't know girls could be pilots and I kind of just looked at her and I was like yeah yeah we we can and we do and we are and and so can she . And the little girl just kind of look at her mom was like I want to do that and that was the most neat thing I'd seen in a while . So yeah very very cool . Uh So you know as we get close to wrap it up , I'm just curious . So you you're you're an I . P . Your face shape um you know but what's what's next , what do you think next on the list for Ashley Bird ? Yeah , so I will drop my assignment next summer probably around july august ish time frame . And you know you'd think that the a 10 would be the aircraft that I would want to go to and I would be delighted to go to the a 10 . But the more and more I talk to my husband about it , I think the F- 35 is probably the next jet that I would be interested in flying . Um As I'm sure you guys all read and the Air Force times and all the headlines , they've been trying to get rid of the A 10 for the past , you know 10 20 years , they can't do it because the 10 most supreme air to ground aircraft in my humble opinion but um there you know after 12 to 3 ish assignments um from what I've gathered from some of the A 10 guys that I've gotten to know they're kind of heading

them over to the F 35 . So I'm hoping to meet my husband on the other side flying the F 35 I think the army would agree with for sure , I'm sure . Well , you know , great talking with you today and I feel compelled to get this into the to the podcast because , and I didn't really have a question for it , but she said after all , Bird , referring to you still refers to a quote she learned during her time and produce ROTC excuses are tools of the incompetent . But was that a force generator who first told you that ? No , actually ROTC . We uh , we learned that quote prior to going to field training . Um , it was , it's a , it's a much longer quote than that , but we learned that prior to going to field training and I don't know why , but it's always just stuck with me . I like it . I'm gonna steal it . Well , thank you so much Ashley for spending time with us and you know , we're so lucky to have you here in the first command , you know , inspiring , you know , and teaching the next generation of pilots and developing their men , we need Uh , for 2030 so we can continue to fly , fight and win . So thank you . Well , I appreciate the time to be here and thank you all for listening . I really enjoyed it . Just an incredible conversation with Captain Ashley Bird and some really great insight into her thought processes as she approaches life as a force generator and , and even with rated diversity improvement and the mentors that came before her , including Major General Jeannie Leavitt , who is a legend in the Air Force pilot community . So thank you to Ashley for joining us today on the pod . As a reminder , you can follow air education and training command and our commander . Lieutenant General brian Robinson on social media . A E T C is on facebook twitter and instagram while you can find Lieutenant General Robinson on twitter at E T C underscore commander as well as on facebook at a e t C command team for 24 7 News and notes . You can find us as well on the web at www dot a e t C dot af dot mil . Thanks for checking out the podcast as we dive into the world of recruiting , training and education for our entire a e t C public affairs team . I'm dan Hawkins . So long we'll talk to you next time on the Air Force starts here