

Thank you . 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 , hey , everybody , welcome in to the Air Force starts here . Thanks for the subscribe , stream or download . However , you might be listening in . If you get a chance to throw us a review , 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 airman insight , tips , tricks and lessons learned from the recruiting training and education world episode 66 of the podcast today . And it's all about the journey to and through the Air Force by Chief Mas Sergeant Lee Hoover . And he is going to talk to his old friend and next door neighbor , Chief Mass Sergeant Stefan Blazer , the command chief at Air University about why he stayed in the Air Force . Chief Hoover is retiring the end of the month and he sits down with Chief blazer talking through his decision to join the Air Force . His journey into being a broadcaster in public affairs , his favorite assignments and then ultimately why he stayed in the service , they also spent a little bit of time talking about their time at basic military training has both spent time with the 37 training wing at JBs a lackland . They talk about their admiration of military training instructors and all that they do every day generating the future force . And then towards the end of the podcast , they spend a good deal of time talking about the importance of family and you don't want to miss Chief Hoover's stories uh about resilience and how he's come to learn so much from being a husband , a father . And it's really helped him uh as a wingman and in his Air Force capacity as well and the importance of family and loving them before it's too late . It's really some powerful stuff . So hope you can take time to listen all the way through . No spoilers , but Chief Hoover's passion for people and service . I mean , it shines right through and on a side note , it's kind of full circle here . But Chief Hoover was a guest on the very first episode of the Air Force starts here way back in early 2019 , talking about the then new B M T curriculum that was focused on readiness and legality . So really cool that we could help share his air force story in this full circle kind of way on the podcast . So take it away Chiefs . Episode 66 of the Air Force starts here . Launches right now . Yeah . Well , uh , Chief Master Lee Hoover , I uh I gotta say before you leave town , man , I just , uh , I wanted to invite you out and have a conversation . You know , this is your , this is your last week in uniform on active duty . And uh , it's been sitting with me , I'm putting in my boots this morning and I'm like , ok , I got three more days . Yeah , like la it , of those boots , right . We talk about those little things that you don't even think about that . Uh , put the ribbon rack on the service dress uniform , lacing up the boots , washing the clothes , you know , I washed my , uh , uniform last night . My wife moved to T L F and she's like , do you need me to wash this uniform ? I just put on this one's the clean one that I had for Monday . And I was like , you can wash it , but I don't think I'm ever gonna wear that , that one again . And , uh , in the rotation in the rotation of the three of them , they just rotated it out . So , uh , yeah , it , it's been a good joy though . Good run . Yeah , I mean , I , I just wanted to kind of invite you to sit down and have a conversation . Um , you know , you and I have had many of these and uh um I think the biggest thing is , is I'd like to talk about your journey , man . Right . You know , I think , uh 22 years , 22 years . And so , uh yeah , I think just spending some time to talk a little bit about it , reflect a little bit about it . What service is meant to you . I think

both personally . Um , and I think , you know , I look at it as like the , the family on two fronts , right . We got the family on the home front and we got the family that we also serve next to . And , uh , man that you've been a brother and a leader . Uh , you know , and every , every step that I've , I've known you . But , uh , yeah , I don't mind if you mind just starting off with kind of where you're from a little bit and what attracted you to join the Air Force in the first place . Yeah . So I'm from , uh Snow Washington little town . Did you say it again ? Nobody knows snow . It's about 30 minutes north of Seattle , Washington area . 30 45 minutes . Um , born and raised in that town . I knew nothing but that town , my mom was born and raised in that town , knew nothing but that town and that's just kind of where I was gonna be , um , graduated high school in 1998 . And I actually remember a friend of mine who was going to the Air Force Academy and I thought he was foolish , man . Why are you going to the military ? What are you doing ? He was gonna go play football for the Academy . Uh , I went off to college and went to the University of Washington and , uh , I just really had no direction . I didn't know what I wanted to do , didn't know what I wanted to study . Spent more time , you know , hanging out partying honestly than going to school . Unfortunately . And so I just kind of got lost and was doing a bunch of different jobs . And I don't remember why . I , I don't remember what it was that first put me into the recruiter's office . It was just , I think it was a , uh , maybe a commercial , maybe it was a conversation . I can't remember . I just remember knowing that I needed to do something . And so I went to the recruiter's office and I , I actually , I was thinking Navy or Air Force and I like to tell a story because it's just brilliant . And my , my , uh , recruiter tech sergeant , Linda Reeves , I told , I went to the Air Force recruiter first and I said , hey , uh , I'm thinking about joining the Navy or the Air Force . And she's like , oh , ok , that's interesting . And , and she took a quarter out of her pocket and she put it on the carpet and she says , ok , well , this carpet that's the sea . She says this quarter that's you . And it's Friday night . What are you gonna do ? And I was like , wow , this is on Reeves . Yeah , this , I said , I'm joining the Air Force . And so , uh , I joined the Air Force and , uh , I first signed up in July of 2000 . Went off to basic training in January . 2000 . I actually signed up . And when I first went to the job counselor , uh , I wanted to be a broadcast journalist at the time . I was listening to a lot of like , talk radio . Yeah . Where does that come from ? That was just a kind of a personal interest . You , you , yeah , I , I , I listened to a lot of talk radio . I liked it . I like , I love the movie more , uh , movie . Good Morning Vietnam . Um , I just wanted to do that and then when I went to , I didn't know that was an opportunity in the Air Force when I first went to the recruiter's office , but I saw it on a pamphlet that they had so I was like , I could do this in the Air force recruiter was like , yeah . And so I go to the job counselor and I tell them that like , hey , I wanna do broadcast journalism and the job counselor at maps was like , yeah , no , that's , we're not gonna do that . Uh I , I guess I scored high in my , for like , electronic . Will you put it somewhere else ? So , I actually left the MP station as an electronic warfare specialist . That was gonna be my job and I went back to , um , the recruiter and she's like , what did you get ? I said I get electronic warfare and she's like , oh , that's amazing . I was like , yeah , it sounds really cool . I really just wanted to be a broadcast journalist but , you know , this is what I'm gonna do . She's like , uh , so just to talk about how great my recruiter was . She called me a couple weeks later and says , hey , I found out what you needed to do to be a broadcast journalist . Why don't you come back in ?

And so at the time and I think they still do it . Now , you had to do a voice audition and you had , so I came into the office , I had a little cassette tape in the back play , play and record at the same time and just start talking , you had to read some sentences . You had to talk about why you want to be a broadcast journalist and you , we sent it off . Um And I was gonna go to basic training on , I guess it would have been 16 , 17 January 2001 because my birthday is January 14th . I wanted to go right after my 21st birthday . She calls me either the end of the year right after January 1st says , hey , congratulations . You got selected to be a broadcaster unless you get to do that I was like , oh , this is amazing . She says , but you have to leave early and so you have to go on January 9th . And so I left January 9th and my 21st birthday was in my first Sunday . The first Sunday training was my 21st birthday . Not quite the party , not the party . My , my fellow recruits or my trainees or whatever were like , hey , you should go ask the M T I for a drink and it's like , no , I'm not gonna do that . Maybe if it was week four or five , I probably would have said them but not , not with your week , man . How cool is that ? You know , you and I , like , there's somebody listening to your voice right now , you know , like in this forum , uh , then maybe they're even thinking about it and it isn't for , uh , Reeves , you said , right ? Linda Reeves , like , just coming down and just being persistent , you know , with it now , I think it's interesting is in the public affairs , uh , I mean , that domain is kind of shifted quite a bit . You could almost say it is a , it is warfare in its own , right ? But , but I , but I think , you know , just looking for where you're in this . So you're still talking , this is what year then ? This is January 2000 and then 2001 was when I joined the Air Force . Early 2001 . Yeah , early 2001 . I went to base training in January , graduated February went to technical training at defense information school in uh Fort Meade Maryland and graduated there in May , I think and went home on recruiter assistance program . And I went to my very first assignment which was air base overseas right away . A F N Yeah . And I wanted to go home . I , so this is another thing that I tell folks sometimes when I went , when I joined the Air Force , it was very reluctantly , it was uh out of like desperation in a way . Like I just need to get out of here . Let me do four years . I was kind of like , still , I can't believe I'm joining the military . This is , you know , I'm not very military . Um And so I was like , I'm gonna do four years and then the night before you go to the hotel or the night you're going to the hotel , you know , at maps , you sign another form . It's that last enlistment form . I don't know what the number is , whatever , but that has the number eight had the number eight on it because you're basically signing up for eight years , four of it , active duty , four of the individual . And I remember seeing the number eight and just , you know , raising my hand and saying , like , hold up a second . I was only signed up before I have been gone here , right ? And uh they explained that they already reserves to me . And it's like , well , I already got my bags packed , I guess I'm just going . And so I signed on the dotted line and left . And so in basic training , like I wanted to go back home , you know , just day four basic training , I was like , this is the worst thing I've ever done . Right . And then , uh , I wanted to go back home to what would have been air Force base at the time . Uh , but there's as a broadcast journalist , a F N the really the only places you could go was overseas . So I got an assignment for air base Turkey and , and here we go . Yeah . You know , it's funny to you bring it up right now . I think I did the exact same thing when I was at that final night and I was going line by line because you're right . That's when it gets serious . It gets very , it's very serious . I'm taking , I'm gonna get on

this plane , this destination and , and probably in about 24 hours or 48 hours life is not gonna be as enjoyable . Like , you know , that's happening . But I remember reading that four and four and I was like , wait a second , you know , and they were like , hey , no , it's inactive . I was like , I don't know . It's still , it's still a commitment though , right ? Like I'm still signing for something and then , uh , yeah , we'll jump into that a little bit more about how we , how you get to look at that . You and I both B M T from a different lens . So , so then you , you can you go off , um off , we go off to Turkey into the Turkey . Yeah . And uh and 2001 still . This is June 2001 when I arrived at a F and in Turkey now . And uh I loved it . I loved it . It was so much fun . Um , one because I was a broadcast journalist and that's just fun . I mean , I was on radio . It's funny . Like I said , I wanted to be a radio DJ . I like good morning Vietnam . I was terrible at radio . Like , I just did not do that very well . You get him with a good morning in like , well , I didn't do that . That would have been kind of cheesy , you know , I mean , I would have loved it but I did get to do the morning show on a few times . I did an afternoon show for a little bit , did a lot of radio news updates and stuff like that . And , uh , but I , I , I don't know if I would say I was . Yeah . Well , yes , I was terrible when you compare it to people who do this for a living . I definitely wasn't at that level . And like , for me , like , just hit , hit the mic opening up , the mic on a board was very intimidating to me for some reason . Uh But the thing I didn't expect to like , but I ended up loving was the TV , part of it , taking a camera going out with your beta tape , shooting some video highlighting a story , highlighting a mission , highlighting an individual , bringing it back the creative process of putting the videos together , putting your voice underneath it and , and just reporting if you will on what the Air Force does , I love that . And I had some great leaders right off the bat at a F N Bobby Blair , Eric , that's what we start getting into right now because you know , we got um we're gonna try to in the next amount of time we have this morning together . Unpack . I blocked two hours . Yeah . OK . We'll see , we'll see if our boss stay with us . But , you know , I think there's those big pivot points , obviously first duty station is this for me and then there's somebody who sees something in you who ignites it a little bit , right ? And then you first start to taste . Um Yeah , I mean the bar of excellence , right ? You're trying to say , hey , can I ? But , but then there's this , this kind of journey where you go between the different tiers , right ? And have the opportunity to where you and I get to serve today , you know . So , so those those N C Os early on for you or maybe he was even senior staff sergeant John was the first supervisor I had , when I got off the plane at air base , he had a Hoover vacuum box standing sitting next door way , this was how he was . Like , he's like , I walk up to him . I was like , is that for me ? He's like , are you hoover ? I'm like , yeah , I was like , all right , let's go . He and his wife took me out to dinner the first night and right off base in Turkey's hearing the prayers , eating the chicken something . I can't remember what it was from the plane . Like you arrive and they're taking , yeah , they , they threw me in the door , put your stuff in the dorm room . Let's go to dinner and uh some good old old school sponsorship . Yeah . Uh Bobby Blair showed up shortly afterwards . Uh He is somebody that is hugely influential at the very beginning . He was our operations manager . Eric Zones was the called the detachment chief . He was a mass at the time . And those two , like you said , you know , when I mumbled a lot as a kid , I took speech therapy as a kid when I was joined as a broadcast journalist . My mom was like , what ? Like you can't , I , I still mumble . Uh So I would have been horrible but they saw something

sat down with me , taught me what it means to be a broadcast journalist , gave me opportunities . They would send me out on a uh shoot and I'd come back and rather than just leaving it to me , they'd sit down with me . Ok , here's how you're supposed to look at this . Here's how we put this together . And then when it was done it was like , look at what Lee did , you know . And , uh , and then they would put me in for rewards and I , I ended up finding just kind of success in that realm right off the bat and um it's all due to them and there are people I looked up to Chris is some of that . Um I mean , you may know and maybe you don't , but um he was hugely influential one still today , one of the best uh broadcast journalists I've ever , I can see you reflecting on it right now , man . He's just so good . It's really , it's really neat though when you describe them , that's how I see you . Oh come on , like in the way you operate them like these early imprints , you know , like I , I , I , because I've had a chance to you and I met , I was trying to remember this . The first time I saw you was , was K Hill . Um you were coming for a visit with Sheep Air Force Cody uh was in building 2000 . He was doing an all call . So this would have been like , I was trying to think back like maybe 14 . Yeah , exactly 14 . And I remember seeing you , I think you might have been a maybe a senior at the time and I was like , man , this dude's sharp , you know , like , um but , but then we got a chance to sit down uh within 17 , then our families for dinner , like end of 17 , we have when the both of us on the command chief , the board list or whatever it was and that was the first time . But , but I mean , even since then just the way that you're constantly sitting down with people putting them out front and then always giving credit to the person who's invested , you know , and it's just really interesting to kind of see those early uh difference makers for you , you know . So , so , ok , so , so , well , I was taught , well , I guess , yeah , I mean , the power of an example , we talk a lot about that . Yeah , but , but that's a pretty significant year . So if you could describe kind of , um , this is all pre 9 11 , then this is all pre 9 11 , just learning the ropes , having fun , um playing a lot of soccer , you know , just the Air Force became like , oh , wow , this is amazing . The camaraderie the , and I think it was so good . I said I wanted to go home . If I would have gone home , it would have been different experience . I got to go overseas , completely out of my element , go experience what the Air Force has to offer and I loved it and I just had so much fun . Every day , went to work , had a blast , would go home , have a blast . Spend time with the people around you . We were just all just having fun . I went on some early T D Y s . My very first tt Y was to Las Vegas , Nevada for uh the National Association of Broadcasters . I had one like a um an annual award or something . So as what , as a award recipient , I got to go out to Riverside California , which is where A F N had its broadcast center . So I got to go there for a week of training and then I got to go with some chiefs and in broadcasting out to the National Association of Broadcasters . So I also went T D Y all over . Um And then of course 9 11 happened , there were some things that changed the way that we operate in that part of the world . And so I got to go T D Y and cover a lot of that . Um Like I remember covering the down uh uh be well before that , I remember covering operation Northern Watch before Iraq covered operation of watch , which kept that no fly zone active over northern Iraq . And then after operation Iraqi Freedom kicked off , closed down Northern Watch , closed down Southern Watch as well . Northern Watch , of course , being out of the air base . But I got to fly to peace . A Prince Sultan air base . Cover the close closure of that installation , the build up of I E D at the time . And uh which is funny now because I remember going to P A , this is probably 2003 maybe . And uh it was all

harden facilities . It was a base . We were using it for years . We closed it all down going to I E D and it was just a couple of tents . And then now you go to ID , it's a city , a city you go to P A and they're living in tents because it's like , and we got airmen now deploying to P A . It's like , oh , yeah , I'm like , man , I remember being there 20 years ago and , yeah , so , uh we live the cycles . Yeah , everything is , yeah . And people will tell you that . Yeah . So the , uh , where were you on 9 11 , 9 11 ? I was at uh A F and , you know , in Turkey it was the afternoon and we were getting ready to shoot our nightly newscast and we didn't shoot it live . We shot it live to tape . And uh , so it was probably three in the afternoon , 3 34 . And uh we were getting ready to shoot the newscast and we have our , our , we had the TV studio looks a little bit like this , right ? Um And then you have a control room in the back where we got folks over there and then you have like a , uh , just kind of a general area . We could watch TV . S and you kind of schedule the TV out . Uh , and we had a bunch of guys out there where you watch TV . S and they were just a lot of commotion and I was in the control room trying to get everything ready . And , uh , I was like , what's going on , what's going on ? And we had the first plane had hit the towers and all of us kind of gathered on the TV . We watched it and we thought it was an accident . Everybody thought it was a fix it . So I remember being like , ok , guys , let's go . We got to shoot this newscast . Like I gotta go , I mean , I think I got soccer practice later . So wait , let's get this done . You didn't realize the world of change ? No , no , we were just like , hey , I thought everybody was just wasting my time like let's go . Ok , that was crazy . Uh But then as we were kind of talking , the second , we saw the second plane hit life like everybody else . And that's when we were like , oh goodness . Um and then as the report started coming out of what was happening , uh Of course , air base went into Delta as the A F N station there . We were the primary source of communication . You know , this is before internet is the way that it is now , this is before from an operational lens . Right . Yeah , from , from like the only source of television and radio they had was a F N , right . So we were the ones able to provide . Obviously we broadcast CNN so you can watch that at Fox or whatever it is . Um , but then we would be able to come on live and we did that for , uh , 24 hours . So I remember that night where I was getting ready to go , I ended up staying there all overnight . We would do and it was the first time we went live from the studio in , in years . So we would do live updates . Like here's what's going on around the installation because it's scary place . You're like air base , the , the base goes into de um , you don't know , you don't know what's going on . Nobody did . And , and so , uh we , we were in 24 hour news cycle there , keeping the station open , uh , probably a week or two and , uh , until things kind of settled down . But , uh , and that , and then , yeah , everything changed after that , you know . Yeah , I think for so many of us , right . That , uh , where were you defining moment ? I was in a station in Pearl Harbor , Hawaii . That was my second assignment . Um And uh I was on the , um , the watch is what the kind of way we had . Um , you know , I was working the intel missions and stuff , but I , I was at home sleeping . And , uh , my wife's , my wife's dad called and said , hey , turn on the TV . You know , um , it was pretty early in the morning . Same thing happened . Right . We , we , you know , we turn on the V , we saw , um , you know , one of the towers had already been hit and then we saw the , the second and , and I just put my uniform on and went to work . Like , I think so many of us , you know , I didn't wait for a call . I didn't wait for , you know , we all just kind of um we rallied . So , so I asked you , you know , why did you , uh why did you join ? So , I mean , like the

next natural question and maybe it pivots off of that um moment in history . But , uh you know , why did you stay ? Yeah , I stayed because I stayed for two reasons . I stayed because the people I was standing next to were some of the best people I've ever met in my life . And I wanted to be a part of that family for as long as I could . Um There's just a natural sense of camaraderie . I was having fun . I love standing next to the people . It was the best thing I'd ever done up to that point in my life as far as just joy , I was finding joy doing it . Um And then I realized like this was something special that I got to be able to do . Um , and there's still , there's always that always kind of still , it still exists in me , that desire . And uh I remember thinking the Air Force was going to be something that I did until I did something else that was kind of like , ok , it's gonna be four years and then I'm gonna do something else . Ok , I'll do four more , but then it's gonna be whatever I'm gonna do after that . And then after a period of time , it became the Air force is what I'm going to do , period . And there was a pride in that because I'm serving my co like , I'm serving my country . I'm , I'm doing what I'm supposed to do . I'm wearing the uniform . I have , you know , you've heard me say it before , but there you have this awesome responsibility that we get to carry as uniform members to carry out what our nation is asking us to do . And it's humbling and we should be humbled by it and I didn't want to give that up . I loved it . So that's why I ended up staying and that's why I ended up staying for much longer than I ever thought I was gonna go . Um , and I'm not , I'm retiring , but I'm not leaving because I don't find that joy anymore . And that's why I've , you know , I've struggled even over the last couple of months as I get closer and closer . Now , three days away , like , am I doing the right thing . I'm gonna miss this so much , you know , and I know I am , it's right for my family . It's that time . But , but , uh , but I love it , you know , we do , we get to do something very , very special in uniform and we get to meet special people like you and all the other people we've met and we would not have been able to do that . So , so I think we , you know , we jumped across the um the towers being hit to , you know , staying was staying always an easy choice for you . Always enlistment . It was for you . Never , never . Yeah , it was always an easy choice . It was , I mean , I guess the only hard choice you were clear on , on what your privatization was like you were . I'm loving it . I'm having fun . I love what I do . I don't want to do anything else . Was it the same ? You had , you had great leadership teams that helped you make that choice easy . I mean , I always had good leadership teams . Yeah , I air base was there . I went to Yako Air Base Japan after in 2004 and I had Pete Casiano was there met uh some an army staff . So this was a jointunit . So I had some army marines , marine gunny sergeant . Um I had uh army sergeant , Dan Wiltshire . Um Pete Casiano was an air force chief that was there . Brendan Vargas was a good friend of mine and you just have these guys that you're like , hey , you know , again having fun being on the radio , traveling the world , telling the news , telling the Air Force story . And uh what I wanna do , the only hard part was like , am I really doing this ? Am I staying four more years ? Um But there was never a part of me that's like I just really want to get out . I never felt I wanted to get out even to this day . I don't really want , I know it's time to get out , but I don't really want to get it . It's like I love it . And I know that's probably not a very good uh story in the sense of like I had to wrestle with the decision . I never wrestled with the decision . I always , this is what I wanna do easy . Let me raise my right hand and let me say , yes , I got it . This , this is this , this is the place that I found , found joy in life and in uniform . But I think , you know , me knowing you . Um I just think

you're very clear on what matters to you . And so I think those choices , whenever you come to them , they , it's easy to know what direction you step in . Like the , the , the reason , the reason you're moving on to another phase in your journey is the family . Like you knew that was a very clear priority for you . Um You know , I look back for me , I've always , uh you know , the search for meaning that we , that we have in life . And , you know , for me , the first ring list was super easy because it was like , hey , we're , we're sending to Hawaii but you got to ring enlist like , ok , I'm going to Hawaii , you know , like I , I want this girl that I convinced to marry me , like I probably won't get a chance to live in Hawaii . And then the second one is kind of mid point . But um I think the point you bring about responsibility , this awesome responsibility that didn't start going full circle to me until probably later on . And , and I had , um because I think you just don't , you just don't realize it , you don't realize the , the short conversations how impactful they are . You don't , you don't realize , you just said something to somebody . It might have been just , and then years later they , you say , hey , you know , you don't know how much that meant to me at the time , you know , and you were just trying to be helpful maybe or um I think sometimes you don't realize the small little things that you do when you're looking down , you're sort of strong and the effect that they have on that on whether the kill chain or whatever it is that the , the , the guy at the dispersing counter and finance and the impact that they're having the ripple effect across our force . Uh Or even just the broadcast journalist cap captioning the video of somebody or , or the P A airman and what they're doing , you don't realize it until later and you see the bigger picture . One of the most powerful questions I ever got asked at A S which is , I always love A L S are just always um very candid , you know , and I think it's because , you know , they're still thinking about , hey , is this , is this continually for me ? You know what I mean ? Um But , but I had an arm and ask me , hey , what is it like to serve with both feet in ? And it's a good question . And I thought that man , what a great question . But now I'm like when I lace up the boots , I'm putting both feet in every day . Like I , I , I always think about that . I like that , you know , to serve both people and , and so , so , so across this time frame for you , let's talk about family now . OK . So you meet a girl . So I uh stationed in Japan . Yeah . And uh while I was in Japan , I kind of , I was what years now ? This is 2004 , 2005 . Um Had a lot of fun in , you could air base . Japan was probably my favorite assignment . Um Japanese people , the Japanese countryside , everything's just wonderful there . Uh Met a girl there . I was dating her for a while , spent a lot of time off base . And , um , but I just knew I wanted more and , and , uh , a good friend of mine , Danny mckitrick who I was stationed with in , uh , Turkey . He would , uh , he , he knew my story as I was kind of wrote , grew up as a believer , a little bit kind of bounced back and forth . And , uh , he would always invite me to church and be like , hey , you know , you need to come to church . It's like , you know , and uh I just remember waking up and just be like , I need more in my life . And , uh , so I told him like , hey , I'm gonna go to church today , right ? And so I went to church and kind of at that moment just kind of rededicated my life to the Lord . And um she left Japan shortly afterwards . And so when I got in my next base was San Antonio Texas . So I got to lack Air Force base over there on the training side in the back of the lodging facility there . Um , got into my room and opened up the phone book and I was like , churches , look for churches , right ? Uh It was back when I had phone books back when they had phone books and I wouldn't , maybe I'm sure they probably would have had 2006 . I'm sure they had Google



obviously , but I didn't , wouldn't , you wouldn't think to search Google for a church , I guess at the time . So I'm looking through the phone book and there's a big ad and ok , I'm gonna go to this church . It was Hills Church and , uh , it was actually pretty far from LA . So I don't know how , but I ended up going to that church . And , uh , I met my wife there a couple months later , not that first day , but , um , wife Stephanie met there in San Antonio . We dated for a year . Uh , I deployed , we got , when I got back , we got married and , uh , you know , her , she's , uh , she's pretty amazing . I really got lucky . There's luck , uh , uh , very lucky in love . Uh , she's a tremendous individual and just , uh , a resilient soul . Someone just gives me a lot of joy . Um , there's really no joy without her . Right . And , um , and the stuff that she's gone through , she was a very successful hairstylist at the time . I had a lot of high end clientele , the local news anchors and , uh , and , uh , let's go with me and experience this world . And so it's been a rough road for her . But , um , yeah , she's been tremendous . Yeah . Yeah . Um , so for those listening in , uh , Chief Hoover and I get a chance to be neighbors right now . And so over the past year we've lived , uh , 100 ft from each other . Um , the , that's right . Come on , you know , they our dogs , they're barking at each other , the pits and , and , uh , but the beauty of it is , you know , we've got a chance to get to know Stephanie and , and , uh , and your girls too , which I like to talk a little bit about , you know , so when we , we kind of fast forward to the first time our families shared a meal was , I think we're saying it was 17 , we had a , uh training course together . And uh you know that I think it was really a lot of times we have military training , but it's the first time your spouse is for me , that was the first time my spouse got to join too . And I remember Jen was talking to me about that . So we , we got to do fine dining . There was like call how to protocol , how to bread and drink . And uh we were all like sitting , you know , proper dining and courses that um but I remember our , our wives got to be , you know , that , that night and uh who would have known , you know where that was gonna crazy where that was gonna be kind of . And I don't reunite . Yeah , you had said that you remember seeing me in , in 14 or so . And I don't remember that . I , I feel like I remember that night and knowing you who you were but not knowing who you were like , like it was , I felt like it wasn't the first time we met , I don't remember where we met maybe before then , but I do remember that night . Of course . Very well . Yeah . Yeah . Yeah , definitely . And so fast forward again , then we get a chance to serve together in basic military training . Yeah . Yeah . So how was that experience for you ? Not going full circle , going back ? Uh Well , so can I rewind a little bit before we get into that ? So I wanna , I wanna talk about going to work for the s on the Air Force because I wouldn't have worked at B M T . Like , that's not significant . You Yeah . Well , and the only reason I bring it up because you mentioned B M T and , and really what I want to start with the B M T is like , I would like on the Air force . Cody said , hey , what do you think about B M T ? And so that's how I ended up there . And uh but I went to go work for Chief Cody for um pretty much his entire time , right ? I got there in July of 2013 . He uh kind of took the position in February of 2013 and I left in February 17 , right ? When uh I mean , literally the last task I had was to orchestrate the transition of responsibility ceremony , retirement ceremony for Chief Cody . Chief Kay Wright came on and uh I like , drove away being like peace everybody . Good luck , right ? And uh and drove down to B M T but that was a awesome four years . Um , and just an incredible experience working for Chief Cody and , you know , we've had some conversations and everybody has their opinions . Usually they're , I'll advise just

wrong . Uh I may think probably nobody in our air force is nobody in our air force spent more time with Chief Cody when he was wearing that stripe than me . I'm confident of that . Yeah , maybe my friend Chad Goff , who was running around with us a lot of time . But is that the 86th day ? He'll be here this week . Um And I saw him up close every day and I knew how much passion he had , how much care he had . You talk about bold leadership . He is the example to me about bowl leadership . He will always be an example of bold leadership to me . Um I think he was tremendous and uh it bothers me when people say other things about him . But um he was great . So we had a good time uh serving together and then at the end of that , you know , OK , what do you want to do ? And I got the job technically as a P A guy , broadcast journalism is part of the P A triad . Um And then got the job working for him . And then at the end of it , I had made chief , I had just made chief , I got there as a senior select and on senior , right when I had got there and then , uh , made chief on the way out . And I was like , hey , what do you wanna do ? And at the time I was thinking , well , I can go back , I think there's a combat camera squad or maybe try that or go be a chief in one of the match comps for P A and , and he said , well , what do you think about basic training ? We were putting at the time it was shortly after the um , the scandal , if you will in 2012 , 13 . And we had transitioned to where Chiefs were in B M T now . And they're not , they weren't prior M T s and didn't have to be prior M T s . And so there was an opportunity for me to go be a squadron chief at B M T . And when he , I remember the first time he said , it's like , are you kidding me ? Like me the basic training . Uh but he knew , like was from San Antonio . He knew and like I remember him telling , he's like , no , that's exactly why I wanna send you to B M T because you're not an M T I . And uh so I prayed about it , talked about it with my wife and uh , and this , at the end of the day , I was like , challenge , accepted , challenge , accepted that let's push my way out of my comfort zone . Let's embrace this . Let's go . And I remember going down there being very intimidated , I guess is a good word by just the idea of M T I s right . I'm still pretty young . I'm a brand new chief and I was a very young chief that I'd been in at that time . See , 17 , I had just been in 16 years , had pinned on chief . Brand new chief . Still young wa known nothing about B M T walking into a room full of M T I s and then looking at you and in my head , I'm thinking they're looking at me going , who is this fool ? Why is he here ? That's what's in my head , right ? Um And then you just OK , I'm gonna do the best I can connect with them and then you start realizing the M T I s are all people too . And uh what an experience I was there for three years . Yeah , so I'll , I'll uh rewind a couple of things too . I remember the first time I met you because obviously uh Chief Cody was come to speak and um you know , and this is the time where I , I think it's a , it's a , it's a really important point you make because everybody has these strong opinions about people that they've never had a chance to meet . We all do . I mean , like we do that because we live in this era where we get fed things . Um But I remember he said something to me , to the group , right ? And it was uh and it always resonated with me and , and the first thing was , hey , how , how many of you believe that uh uh we have an inflation problem on our APR s right ? Inflation like you know where this is going , right ? Everybody's hands up the whole room . OK . Um How many of you have written inflated E pr S yourselves ? And everybody's like , oh , well , maybe I , how many of you yourself have an E pr that's inflated and it was this ability to be like , oh man , maybe , maybe , yeah , like , but it was like went from everybody to , well , no , not , not me , you know , and , and , and it really made me pause about doing my part and I am I doing my part . I think another

part of that which I've , and this may be a side note and I don't , I know we don't want to go down this but how many of you have seen other people's E pr s ? Not many . I , I don't remember growing up . I mean , now I've seen a lot of other people's E pr but when I was , you know , young and I wasn't up there just looking at everybody else's E pr so we have no or seeing the package and knowing like , oh , that's inflated , you have no idea . You just assuming . But , but I think the whole point is we're always trying to find a different form or a different thing and through on that versus , you know , leadership is tough , you know , sitting down and , and having dialogue with people and moving them from where they're at to a better place because you see potential in them or , you know , that's an ongoing thing . And I just uh I always remember that and then I also always remember a thing he talked about um when somebody would say non ball , they were non ball to somebody , you know this location . And he would say , hey , last night check , we all raised our hands to do what the nation needed and just that truth , right ? Like this is the difference between like , like he's not , he's not going for votes here , he spoke truth , he spoke truth . And , and I think even the things he took on , I mean , from developmental special duties to the promotion system to the and he took a lot of like really , really things that have transformed our Air Force today . And , and I think it's shame on us if we criticize the things that didn't go the way that that way they were intended , you know , because there really were some things that , that move the ball forward , you know , no doubt . So , and then not understanding the environment that he was in , this was sequestration . He and General Walsh at the same time with the huge drawdown of resources and trying to live in that environment and um and yeah , he , he took on some things that we had talked about for years that were problems and nobody did anything about it . And it's not because I mean , if nobody had the direction or vision , he just bam , I'm gonna do this and I'm gonna walk the halls of the Pentagon . And that was another thing as an enlisted member . You realize that , ok . Wow , you really need a strong enlisted leadership in that room to raise the their voice and say this is what we need to do . And , and that's what I mean , like he spoke truth and he wanted us to be better . He didn't want you to be , I mean , he wanted you to be happy , of course . Uh but he wanted you to be better . He wanted you to like he wanted us to be a strongest enlisted force . We could be because he knew the value of that strong enlisted force that he would do anything that was right to do that . And that absolutely has remained true . I think of any of any chief mass of Air Force . I mean , that's the bar that they all , you know . Right . So , so one thing I think I base training is , is definitely I remember showing up in the intimidation factor of the , of the M T I s , right ? Like I remember and I , and I just found out recently when you look around the corner and the chief , you you got a second , you would talk to the flight and there could be hundreds of trainees right to rock . Um So what do you think about when you , when you remember just the meaning of serving there ? I think about pride . I think about excellence like core values , you know , like excellence is in B M T . I think about impact and just the tears on the faces when they graduate . The , the feeling of accomplishment , the feeling of pride that they have . Uh I think about transformation . I think about camaraderie , the M T I s being there for each other . And uh I think about all those things and I think , you know , it's funny you're intimidated by M T I s but they are airmen who show up too that have no idea what they're getting into because Ds D a lot of them didn't know that this is in her picture there . This is what we're doing , I guess . And I'm so intimidated and I never wore the hat . I was never an M T I but my journey at B M T followed a lot of

the M T I s journey where you get there . You don't know what you , you don't know if you're gonna be good . You're very intimidated by this idea . Like I've never , with the exception of a few , maybe never even wanted to be an M T I . Right . I don't know if I could do this and then you , oh , I can't do this . Oh , everybody around me , they actually are people too and they actually care for me and they , they are humans , right ? And then , oh by the end of it you're like , I feel confident and I feel challenged and um I grew a whole lot while I was here B M T four M T I S is the best leadership experience you will ever get there . There's no other leadership development experience . I mean , imagine throwing 50 airmen at you in the middle of the night , you know , and saying , hey , by tomorrow morning you need to figure out who the sharpest one is . You need to get them through breakfast , right ? Get him to go get haircuts and you're gonna do within the first week . That is a , I mean , they're not perfect but they're , they're functioning as a team because you as a and you're the only person they're looking at and we don't do that today in the operational course . We don't throw people at you like that to talk about getting through the leadership fire there . Yeah . And I think that's to me when I , you know , I was a textual instructor , I wanted to be an M T I . Um but I , I , I looked at that as man , this is the greatest leadership experience that anybody could ever ever go through . You know , and , and I think even , you know , even your comment about for a while there , um we didn't have , there was a rule you had to be a prior M T I before you were the superintendent of the S C L . You know , now , but I think it's because we changed the prioritization and we just need a great leadership down there , period , you know . Um now , now , now they have it to where you can be a priority . But the , the prior is like we owe this team the best leadership that we can give them . And I think it's the same way for all the N C Os and senior N C Os , all the C G Os down there , you know , that , that are , that are leading . And I think when I look back on it , the hat while I saw it because it's a powerful symbol when I first got there in a way , it almost , I don't wanna say disappeared , but I , I saw the people a lot more , right ? Because you just get to know that . And I heard somebody say this , you know that um I wear the hat , the hat doesn't wear me , right ? Like it's , and , and it really is um something that's special from a family sense of just going in . I , I'd never seen so much teamwork and have each other's back that I had down there . And , you know , I was there through COVID , I think you had just left just prior . Um But that talent was tested and man , they just came through for , for the Air Force in America , you know , big time . I , I , I think before we , we sign off though , I think we've got to talk about the most significant night . I actually remember though when I was there , um , was getting a chance to go to , you know , you were foster and a couple of girls at the time , you know , and it's gonna be hard for me not to get emotional getting through this . So , and I can't imagine for you . So , um , you know , you and I were , were , were , um , coworkers . I definitely knew the family situation had going on . But if you don't mind talking about why you were there leading as an airman , there's some pretty significant things going on the home front . My sharing of that . Yeah . Um , in fact , I'll share , I'll , I'll start there first and I'll do . So I'll share something else that was significant for me in the home front . That's just kind of made me shift the way I view the world . But , um , so my wife and I , we got married . We , we talked about that and , uh , we wanted to have a family , not right away , but after a couple of years we wanted to have a family and just , uh , we weren't able to , we just , we don't know why . We still don't know why , but it just , it doesn't work . Ok . Right . We tried the I V F , we tried the

, all this other , it doesn't work . Ok . Um And just being prayerful about it and just like , ok , well , I guess this is just our , this is what we've been asked to do . And we got to San Antonio uh out of DC . And my wife , I remember coming home one day , this was in February of 17 . We got there . So maybe March , she's like , hey , uh what do you think about fostering ? And I was like , no , no , you know , because I was afraid of like , hey , you can you take the child in but then they're gonna take him out and I don't know who's coming into our house . I and so , but I told her I'll go to an informational brief with you and so we go to the informational brief and it was like , oh , ok , I guess we're foster there . It was like , hey , there's 5000 kids in need in Bear County and you just man , you try to have a servant's heart and like , ok , I can do this , I can do this . And then it was like , ok , we had to take six months of training . So went through all this training and then at first it was like we could do it . We'll just take one kid of school age kids . So put this child in school and then they were is , hey , we need people who are willing to take siblings , ok ? We could take siblings . I guess and whatever age , ok ? Lord , just whatever you guys need , we'll , we'll just , that's , that's where we ended up and uh we finished our training kind of had the agency calls us . Hey , we have these girls . I listen a lot and uh , they need a dad because I think they were with a fo they had put , been put in foster care maybe a month and a half prior to that call , but they were with a single mother and uh they , they needed a dad based on some things that were going on with them . And so um we said , yeah , sure , let's do it . Um And so at the time Alissa was four , Alana was 13 months and uh they came to live with us and it was uh a rough road because it like we had you realize how selfish you are . We were so selfish . And um at that moment , everything changed where you couldn't be selfish . It was constant like they need you . Um And it was two at once and it was just like , uh and there's a lot of uh tears on both ends of them . And right . And uh we did that journey for say two , it was two years because this was October 2017 when they came to live with us the first year , a lot of visits with the parents uh every week or at least the dad and the mom . It was very um foster care is a very difficult thing because you love those kids . You want those kids to be yours . Sometimes we were foster to adopt . We were open to that . Um , but you're also praying and you care for the family , their parents that you , you want them to be successful in whatever they're trying to do . And unfortunately , their parents were not successful in that . And um , so in 2019 , they became eligible for adoption and we raised her hand and said , yes , we want to adopt them and kind of went through that process . And so then in November 2019 , we adopted them and they have , they're now hoover girls less than a lot of hoover . And that night we had , we celebrated that night at Bigs , November 25th , 2019 was the day that we adopted them . And , uh , we were at Bigs and had you guys over and , uh , they've changed our world from a , from a priorities , you know . Well , the most important thing is those girls and when you talk about resilience , like they are an example of resilience to me , especially the oldest Alyssa and everything that she went through because she was four about to be five , everything that she went through in those first five years of life and everything she's kind of gone through now , the emotional arc and not knowing where she was gonna be until she was adopted . And , uh , she's an amazing kid , you know . Yeah . Yeah . Yeah . Yeah . I , I think that's how I look at it , you know , I , I like , I remember it's so vividly standing in that , that burger joint and , and just realizing I was just , I was just captivated by both of you like you and Stephanie like looking at the , you know , um you could just see that you guys have gone

through so much for this moment for this to happen . I remember seeing the family photos , you know , shortly afterwards . Um And , and so , you know , then you , you , you know , you have , you've had some pretty , you've served in positions , you get a chance to see our air force because , you know , after that you go to the White House military office and everything but , and I know it's gonna be tough to get through , you know , uh you know , over two decades in a , in a short conversation . But I think for me it's coming back here and being your neighbor the first time uh Alana came up and gave me a hug with sheer joy and love like , dude , it was just amazing to see the growth in her like true growth and who she is and her happiness , you know , to your point about priorities like putting the whole thing in perspective because a lot of times like in uniform , we like all this like , and you're like , man , like , you know , um it was just beauty man . You know , and I think it's just because you , you're , you're so right . You want , you want people and I think especially our youth to have a future . Um and , and , and one that they can just be the best version of the self , we talk a lot about that but man , um you know , just having the blessing to be next to you guys and see the love that resonates from that home . I love it . Like just the way they come over like , hey , do you have any eggs ? Do you have like , you , you'll send them over as the runner and we do it as we need as well , man . It's , it's just uh it's like I said , man , it's been , it's something we'll never ever forget . Yeah . Um I'll tell you the other story too because in uh 2017 . And so that was a transformative year for me , right ? They got the girls in October 2017 uh in April 2017 , my dad died and you know , the kind of the story with my dad and how he kind of died unexpectedly . And um I remember when he died having this because I didn't have a great relationship with my dad and we kind of tried to repair it . You gonna share that kind of invitation with the uh yeah , the promotion ceremony that Yeah . So I um yeah , so I didn't have a great relationship with my dad growing up and uh when I got time for my promotion ceremony to Chief , I wasn't gonna invite him at all . I , I was not that I didn't want him there . It was more of like my mom was coming . That was a priority to me . Um and having them both , you know , they divorced when I was younger . And so it had been awkward , been hard and , you know , so it wasn't gonna invite him and then I was on the , uh , on a plane with Chief Cody flying back to C and I from probably Maxwell . And , uh I was telling him about , he has asked me about the promotion ceremony . I told you , my dad's not coming . I remember him saying like , well , it's a pretty big deal , Lee , it's a pretty big deal . And , uh , and so a couple of days later , my dad calls me and he's like , hey , I heard you're getting promoted . I'd love to be there . So , of course , I'm like , ok , I'm gonna , I'm gonna go ahead and go or I'm gonna go ahead and invite you . So I invited him out anyways have him , he's there all week . Um I remember a moment at the promotion ceremony where , you know , Chief Cody , he was efficient . He's standing up there talking and uh I looked down in the front row , you know , where your family sits and , and my dad was just looking at me and uh , he just smiled and , and dad's quiet So it's kind of like a gentle smile . Right . Not a big grin . And , um , I just knew that he loved me and I loved him and it was awesome to have him there and , and it was special . Uh , and then that was the last time I saw him alive because he left the next day . And so I'm like , I'm so glad I invited him out and , uh , he left the next day . he , a couple of months later , he fell off a roof , hit his head . He died at the hospital that night . And uh when he died , it was so like like powerful for me of a sense of forgiveness , a sense of love , regret , right ? And just a , a realization that your family is so important that you need to

love them all regardless of what you're going through . And they are the most important duty that you have in life is to love your family . Well , and , and so that when you combine that with the girls and just like , hey , this is what you know , there you could sit there what I want to accomplish in life or what I meant for in life . Hey , you are responsible to love your family well and to treat your family well and , and the best way that I could do that right now is to retire . And so that's why I'm doing that right now . Um But it's uh yeah , that , that all is connected , I think . And so that's why I wanted to kind of share that story briefly in a kind of the rambling way that I just did . You know , I , I think that's the , yeah , I don't know how many times you hear , you know , someone back home is not feeling well or you have somebody and sometimes you're like , oh , I got , got things going on and I think we always have to be reminded like we're built so someone else can pick up this lack . Like that's just the way the military is built . But in those duties at home , you know , you know , I look back on my , my grandma , I was raised by my grandparents and , you know , we had this rare opportunity to , to be home for her birthday and my sister was available to and so we went home and our kids went and , and my daughter made her a cake . Um you know , we put like a whole sash on her crown and everything and , and , you know , um and , and three months later she passed , right ? And , and so that image that I have with our kids around her and I actually she couldn't make it to my promotion . I remember just because of her health . But those that parents medal like that , that have you seen in some of those ceremonies where they give you a parents medal . So , you know , I , I actually put on my service dress because she never seen me in service dress . You know , as a chief , I gave her a parents medal at her birthday and everything too . And I cling to that image , I love that , you know , but I think it's just for everybody is , you know , you're making decisions like that , I think is always , always do the thing that you can't ever get back , you can catch up on work . You know , I think , I think sometimes , you know , when you have to make those decisions . And so as you , you know , you kind of look at , at closing this chapter , you know , what do you , what do you look at as either advice to those who are somewhere else along the journey or , or maybe look at it what the , what the air force has done to transform you to further the values and talents that you have , you know , kind of in life . Um , a couple of months ago I was at , right , and an airman asked me , what does the air force mean to you ? And that was a tough question . I remember like , what does the air force mean to you ? And usually you get a lot of the same questions . I'd never heard that one before . I had to think about it for a little bit and I , the only way I could answer it was everything , it just means everything to me . And you think about like transformation and just experience where I was when I was 20 years old just to go back to the beginning of our conversation . Not know , you know , just being a lost soul , I wore ball bearing necklaces and had bleached blood hair . Right . This is , this was , I got to see , I got to see some played in a punk rock band . This was me and , uh , the people I love right now with the exception of my family are all because of the Air Force , right ? The uh the experiences that I've had the Air Force , the education , the training , just the development , the experience , all the air force . It means everything to me . My wife , I met her because of the Air Force . Everything is because of the Air Force and it means the world to me and I'm gonna miss it incredibly . And I guess my advice to other people would just be like jump in with open arms , always be ready for a challenge . Don't shy away from it . Don't approach it with joy , don't approach it with frustration or because you're gonna be

frustrated . There's let's not kid ourselves . There's plenty of days when I'm frustrated , right ? But you got to approach it with joy and gratefulness that you get to do this and humility . We talked about just the responsibility that you have . And if you could just kind of have that attitude and , and work hard , focus on eulogy virtues , what are they gonna say about you ? At the end of time versus your resume . Virtues and what we're , I wanna get this award , right ? Or I need to get this , save this amount of money . Just be a person of good , strong character . And if you could do that , I think you'll have a successful air force career . I feel like I've had , um , and not because of the , um , I , I don't think I've had a successful air force career because I'm sitting here retiring as a command chief . I feel like I've had a successful air force career because you and I are sitting here together as friends , right ? That's , that's just the joy of it . And um and I have , and you're one of many friends I've made across our air force that it just is time . And so , um I guess that would be the best advice I have is to go out , go to work every day with a smile . And thankfully you get to do what you do because it will transform you . You can't say it better than that . Hard not to walk away from this conversation . Motivated to jump in with open arms and serve in the world's greatest air force . Big . Thank you to both Chief Hoover and Chief Blazer for taking time out to do this podcast . And I'm really lucky as I've had the chance to work on some B M T projects and Enlisted force development projects with Boat Chiefs and glad called him friends as well . Best of luck , Chief Hoover on the next chapter to you and the family . As a reminder , you can follow A E T C on social media . We're on Facebook , Twitter and Instagram . You can follow Lieutenant General Robinson , our commander on Twitter as well at A E T C underscore commander . He's also on Facebook at A E T C team for 24 7 news and notes . You can find him as well on the web at W W W dot ac dot A F dot Mills . 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 .