

Ready, Set, Airlift! Ep. 11 UEI Survival Guide

Carla: The views expressed in the following podcast are not necessarily the views of the United States Air Force or the Air Force Reserve, but rather the perspectives of the individual speakers. No Endorsement of any particular person, business, or interest is ever intended.

Julian Hernandez: Hello everyone and welcome to our latest episode of Ready, Set, Airlift. I'm your host, Julian Hernandez from the Wing Public Affairs Team. An important episode on deck for you this month. We are talking about the unit inspection happening around the July UTA. We're pretty sure the UEI is going to be the talk of the Alamo Wing in the days ahead, so we want to try and give you some tips to prepare yourself and your wingmen with what we're affectionately calling the UEI Survival Guide.

But first, we want to hit on another key piece of Alamo Wing news, just in case you haven't heard. The 433rd Airlift Wing has a new commander. Colonel Douglas Jeffrey is now in the process of taking the reins, as Colonel William Guttermuth retired just about two weeks ago. If you'd like to learn more about Colonel Jeffrey, his official Air Force biography is posted on the main page of our website, 433aw.

afrc. af. mil, or just Google 433rd Airlift Wing. Scroll down on the main page and you'll see Colonel Jeffrey's official photo, then click on it and you'll get linked over to the bio. Now without further ado, let's jump into this UEI Survival Guide.

Julian Hernandez: Mr. Dirk LaFleur, the head of the 433rd Airlift Wing Inspector General Office, joining me now here on this episode of Ready, Set, Airlift. Mr. LaFleur, thanks for taking the time.

Dirk LaFleur: Thanks for inviting me to be here.

Julian Hernandez: Sir, you're new to the unit. You joined us recently within past month or two, correct?

Dirk LaFleur: I have, I've been on board since May approximately 60 days. Previously worked at the Defense Health Agency for a time after about a 28 year successful career on active duty with the Army. So it's a privilege to be with the team. And back with an operational unit, doing operational things. Pleased to be here and thrilled for the opportunity to talk to the Alamo wing.

Julian Hernandez: As an army guy myself or former army guy it's always good to see fellow army folks coming down to the 433rd Airlift Wing. So welcome. And again, thank you for joining us. So the UEI that's coming up, the unit inspection is going to be the talk of the Alamo wing for this July UTA. And so our goal today is to talk through just some basics, getting people ready for the UEI, maybe addressing some of that nervousness that naturally comes when people hear the word inspection. Let's start with, as someone who's new, fresh set of eyes, fresh mindset coming to the wing, how are you preparing yourself?

Dirk LaFleur: Before we get into that, I'd like to just talk about a couple of things just to set the conditions for the Alamo wing. I just want to applaud everyone right now for the work they've done over the last 36 month UEI cycle, because it is a cycle. It's an inspection cycle. So. What we're going to see in the next week would be a capstone visit or onsite inspection from MAJCOM

really what they want to do is just look at and verify and validate, are we abiding by the Commander's Inspection Program, Uh, with the CCIP we are self reporting, so they want to make sure that we're thorough, we're documenting, we're problem solving. . And I want to make sure that I applaud everyone for all their efforts as they continue to prepare for what is called the on site inspection from the MAJCOM inspectors.

I just want to iterate that and then really look like there's an opportunity here to kind of listen, learn, gain some insights and best practices from really the subject matter experts that do this in and out of every wing it's an ability for us to improve our own reporting documentation and make sure we're thorough because it is a self assessment program that relies on smart compliance.

But with that, after joining in May the IG team, we are basically forming a new IG team and then we're getting up to speed on training and really, for the last couple of months, what I've noticed is they've been really collaborative with working with AFRC's inspector general team.

What the requirements are providing any products they need to get a look at our organization and what we do as it pertains to CCIP before they get on the ground. And that's important because you hear things like iGEMS or MIC T and

I want to make sure everybody's familiar with that. Those are just virtual reporting Basically programs of record.

It's a method, right? It's a data collection, but the on site visit is the human interaction between inspector and the unit that's actually doing the mission day in and day out. And that's what's important. So I'd like to leave everybody with an understanding of why.

Why am I here? What role I'm in? What purpose I serve? What those contributions do to the overall mission, be confident that you've prepared well, but also be confident to tell your story and also don't forget about those hidden gems, those strengths that we have inside our programs, either at the team section or staff agency and be able to talk about that and see what their feedback is.

Cause really we're just trying to validate and verify that we are doing the things that we are, have designed to do and accomplish. So that's the important takeaways to mainly be prepared, prepare our team and feel confident that we can understand that what we're asking, they're asking to do is be ready now transform for the future and taking a growth mindset. They're here to teach, advise, evaluate, and what can I take from that to improve going forward as we build into the next UEI cycle.

Julian Hernandez: And I want to key in on that, you mentioned it's a learning experience. It's a sharing of knowledge from other SMEs or subject matter experts from the Air Force. And I think that addresses what I think could be one of the big sources of nervousness with an inspection is that folks may feel like it's a gotcha moment right there on the hunt to try to catch you off guard or catch you backwards and it really doesn't seem like that's the intent at all.

Dirk LaFleur: It's not so they've already looked within the reporting systems.

So they have a good idea what we do and how we do it. I think the flip side is they have a job to do. We have a job to do. They don't just sample our unit, they're sampling all the other wings. So it provides the MAJCOM commander basically an individual and collective look, are his units ready. And it also ties to what we talk about a lot of times is personnel, resources which both on the reserve side can be scarce.

So how do we advocate for ourselves? And it's really a data driven decision process that helps us have data plus eyes on the ground, talking to individuals, doing the mission day in and day out on, yes, they actually need those

resources. I've been in their workspaces, I understand what they're trying to get after and their inherent limitations, constraints, and I think that's valuable data when trying to make a collective decision at the commander level as we're talking from squadron commanders all the way up to MAJCOMs.

I think the other thing is we are the host unit. Let's be professional and be gracious and let's be the epitome of what a professional Airman looks like to an inspector. So I think those are all wise inputs going forward.

Julian Hernandez: I think you touched on a lot of the strategic importance there of the UEI but I want to ask the question point blank.

Even though it could be a bit of a Captain Obvious type question, but why is the UEI important?

Dirk LaFleur: So why it's important is because Air Force went to a self assessment reporting methodology. So one it's a way to check the checker, right? And it just gives us an outside look.

But that the main thing is. It's really to validate what we said we would do as it's pertaining to the wing commander's inspection. There's a lot of work on the improvement side and the coordination side on how we can do that better. But the main thing is for them to see our constraints and to talk with leaderships, to Airmen, to program managers, to superintendents, so they can have a better understanding collectively.

Because there we'll generate a final report, and that final report will provide an assessment on where we are, and based on what MAJCOM and our Air Force requires us to do, provide heavy strategic lift anywhere in the world to support the joint force or answer to what the President would require us to do collectively and individually as air crews. It's important that we have the right resources. And I think that UEI is helping with that. It also helps my office, the IGI in planning for the next set of inspections and readiness exercises as we get into the new UEI cycle, So it gives us some key data. for planning purposes, so we can synchronize that with the commander's intent and the commander's priorities going forward.

Julian Hernandez: Essentially, it helps us see where we're strong and then identify where we need to focus improvement.

Dirk LaFleur: you can look at it that like that, identify my strengths and weaknesses and glean some best practices so we can drive some efficiencies to

get better and expand what we call readiness. I think the Air Force is moving towards looking at combat readiness, in fact, as the other services do. So that's it's an interesting point and it's an opportunity.

Julian Hernandez: Excellent. that's a great strategic overview. Let's zoom in a little bit and talk, tactical, if you will.

What are our Airmen, especially trying to paint a picture for Airmen who may have never experienced a UEI before, like you mentioned, it's a 36 month cycle. So if an Airman has joined us within that cycle and they've never experienced one, I'd like to give them an idea of what to expect when those inspectors enter their work area and start doing their work.

Dirk LaFleur: Those are two good points or two points we could really just highlight. One is, be professional and represent the best of the Alamo wing. That's an individual thing we can think about and execute. Let's be honest, let's embrace feedback. Let's listen with a growth mindset or approach and let's learn as much as we can. They're only here for a short period of time, so let's try to tap into that. Also remember we're in a continuous process improvement cycle, always. So the critical assessment, no one likes to be tested, no one likes to be evaluated, but that critical assessment is necessary in the process to evaluate us and see how well we're doing with the program.

I think the other thing is onsite inspections can be uncomfortable because we don't know, quite know what to expect. But I think they're really looking for some areas That the Air Force looks at what they call major graded areas. Those are areas like executing the mission, leading people managing resources and improving the unit. That's what they're looking for and we owe them the best look with cooperation that we were able to provide, and I think that's what is expected. Again, don't be nervous embrace change or the opportunity to do things better, and I think we'll all be better on the backside of the completion of the UEI capstone visit, and also, Gleam what's provided to us via the final report.

Julian Hernandez: That's a perfect segue into where I wanted to go next with the conversation is now that we've developed a good understanding of what the UEI is, why it's important, is most likely to occur during the UEI itself, let's talk a little bit about what happens on that backside you mentioned. What kind of changes tend to come from UEIs?

Dirk LaFleur: So the changes are we're going to prepare for the for myself and my office working with commanders. On behalf of the Wing Commander, we're

gonna try to tailor based on resources, we'll tailor what we're trying to achieve as it pertains to inspections to validate that we're ready in certain areas, and also help design better, reliable, more realistic readiness exercises. If I can't cover all areas, then the final report would give me an idea what to target for planning purposes. We present those, that plan apply the resources and get the commander's approval and try to do the best we can to improve our stance as it pertains to overall readiness. And that could be at the Airman level through a collective event between two groups trying to achieve achieve a milestone as it pertains to readiness.

Julian Hernandez: I know you're relatively new to the unit as we discussed at the beginning of the conversation, but maybe your team has been able to fill you in the past 60 days or so. How did the unit fare on the last inspection? And maybe what are some of the areas that we're trying to improve upon from last time?

Dirk LaFleur: So what I gather from speaking to the team and then being on the ground here for a couple of months is the reports were favorable and we achieved results. Unfortunately, we need to look at how do we sustain reporting and on a consistent basis as it pertains to improvement.

The wing as a whole, we have observed some, maybe some inconsistencies with problem solving and finding root cause analysis as it applies to the MIC T or the iGEMs as a, a program of record for data. I think the main thing is looking forward as we, Look at constructive feedback from the team as we go forward and do an internal look is how do we do the routine things that are routinely done as it pertains to self reporting.

That means evaluating our education training program as it ties to what the IG does. When you're talking about WITs or your wing inspection team or your SAPM, self assessment program managers. How can we best help them align with what commanders need to do so we can annotate that self assessment, message that self assessment, and then advocate for ourselves for more resources.

I think that's what we're trying to get at is how do we sustain after we get those lessons learned and continually do it over a 36 month cycle with some realistic, measurable thought out various exercises that Contribute to what we're trying to achieve as it's pertaining to mission readiness.

Julian Hernandez: Speaking of lessons learned, what are some common mistakes that you see during these types of inspections? Maybe things that even

people who've gone through them before can overlook if they're not being careful.

Dirk LaFleur: So I think it's several things, right? So if you've been in the military a while, you know that you're constantly under evaluation some forms.

But the main thing is a good refresh, right? And not making some assumptions that I know what has changed as it pertains to a directive or a policy or the way I do or fulfill my role. A good refresh, a clear understanding of the governing regulations.

is there an AFI that's changed? Or. Is there a, a DAFI that's changed recently that pertains to what I do, and that generates a new requirement that I have that will be evaluated.

But it's human nature to say I know that. Or it was taught to me. We have a duty basically to go back and check the reference to make sure it really states that. Before I engage with or talk or discuss or show an inspector who absolutely knows what the directive says or the requirement is.

So I think that's important. What they often look forward to is what we call in IG terms, wet ink or what was referred to as painting the grass green, right? A last minute ad that makes it look good. But is not really purposeful. We're trying to make sure we're doing the things, but knowing what we do, how we do it, and why we do it, not simply, putting a new fresh coat of paint on it is important because that is noticeable then, right?

I'll walk around, something's recently signed or published it's easy to see what's fresh, so I can ask more questions. Be competent, be prepared, be honest. Be responsive and with the mindset of they're here to help it might not be easy for all sections.

It might not be comfortable based on what we've done in the last 36 months, but you can't go back and fix that. They're on ground. Be ready and responsive, I would say to that. and then feel that. You've done all you can to prepare.

Julian Hernandez: Yeah, I think you're keying in on a mindset there. Sometimes there's a fear, to reveal a weakness or an inconsistency or something that wasn't where we would have liked it to be, but as you're mentioning in a situation like this, really the transparency is what the inspector is looking for.

I think they're coming here with the understanding that there's no such thing as a perfect unit anywhere in the military. So being clear and transparent about where the constraints are actually going to help you after the inspection, because that can be identified as a choke point, right?

Dirk LaFleur: Yeah, because they've already assessed us virtually and by the, by what was required of us to provide to them.

So they already assessed that. They're looking for the pockets or, places of noncompliance with which we may have just overlooked based off a mission load availability of personnel or the constraints we operate. Everybody has constraints, but they're looking for the noncompliance is so they can make sure they've done a thorough job of assessing, or validating and are verifying our organization as a wing. But the main thing is they're looking for non compliance. The thing is, they also want to know that you take a proactive approach to problem solving. Have you self assessed or self identified? Did you make that known? Did you already do a root cause analysis?

Did you already do a assessment on and take action steps on solving that problem and then just convey to them that. That's in progress, or that's what you've initiated and that's understandable, right? So cite the problem, identify what needs to be done and take action on it is what they're really looking for.

It's the gross noncompliance. I think that's really gets people in trouble.

Julian Hernandez: That makes a lot of sense. And going back to the expectation of what are the Airmen going to see over the course of the UEI day in and day out? With an inspection like this, is it typical for all tasks to go on hold and the inspection is the pretty much the only thing occurring or are Airmen going to need to balance their normal battle rhythm with answering and assisting the inspectors?

Dirk LaFleur: I like how you talked about balance and it's one of those. It depends, right? It depends what your role is where they're looking at and what they're trying to to verify or validate. Now it coincides with the UTA, so we do have our normal UTA schedule of events. We've done the best we can in the sense of deconflicting what The sequence events will be tied to the UEI as it pertains to facilities and people, where to be.

Based on who they need to talk to, or they desire to talk to. But the main thing is we already these, we synchronize that with the site leads to make sure that we have basically one consolidated sequence of events to accommodate the UTA

and the UEI. I would say that be expected to participate if asked and be flexible to that location and notification.

But likely you will just execute or participate in your UTA events. Don't stop everything you're doing and wait for something to happen. Work with your leadership to Know where you're supposed to be and what you're supposed to be doing.

And that you may or may not be inspected or evaluated and that's okay too. So proceed on with your UTA events. I would just ask everyone to do a self check to make sure I'm in the right place, right time, right uniform, in regs with the right attitude, and understand there's an outside agency in my footprint building, wing, area of operations and just be mindful of that.

Julian Hernandez: Mind your P's and Q's as they say and as someone much wiser than me said, flexibility is the key to air power, right? So I wanted to bring it home with a bottom line up front one takeaway, maybe a lesson or just something you want the Airmen to have on their mind, based on your past experiences with inspections and what you expect for this upcoming UEI.

Dirk LaFleur: So I would say, I just want to basically provide some context and terms, right? There are scheduled events for commanders specifically one on one. And that's really to get the commander's perspective. If there are some opportunities at the individual or collective group level where you will be able to have a dialogue with some of the inspector teams that are looking to gain some understanding.

If you participate, then participate and tell your story based off of what your role is. But I think some common terms are like, what's a finding, what's a discrepancy. There's categories of discrepancies, there's a minor, significant, critical, so those are some terms you may hear.

Some advice in general is just to be attentive and responsive during inspection. Based on what leadership requires of you, you may be new to the position. You may not know everything, so just state what you know and what you've done in that role and what you're trying to accomplish and where you fit in the overall mission.

But the individual action alone. How you present yourself will convey many things to an inspector that will relate to our culture, how we do things. Do we have a can do attitude? Do we have a problem solving nature? Do we have a

growth mindset? Do we come every day with our A game to do the right thing for the right reasons, for the right purpose?

Be confident that you know your job and convey that to the inspector and tell your story. I wouldn't go on a limb and, say something I don't know, or is outside my expertise.

It's okay to say I don't know. It's also okay to say, how can I do that better? So those are things that I would take as lesson learned from past experience is embrace an opportunity to talk to an SME, especially if they're evaluating your area and glean as much as you can for them so you can improve, yourself, your section your staff agency, or your unit.

Julian Hernandez: As someone who's relatively new to the air force myself, this conversation has helped me. understand our. PA section is just as able to be evaluated as every other segment of the wing. So, As someone who's on the receiving end of being inspected, just like the rest of the wing I appreciate the knowledge I've gleaned.

Dirk LaFleur: If I have the opportunity I'd like to leave a reminder today for all our teammates out there getting prepared or preparing for the UEI. over the weekend I was thinking about what can I do to basically stay in theme with, the UEI survival guide and we've talked about that earlier, so I was thinking of an acronym that maybe we can remind ourselves of and that's R.

A. R. E. So what is R. A. R. E., right? R. A. R. E. It could be something unique or it can be something exceptional. Speaking to the commander and in my own office and I just came up with rare. So ready and knowledgeable, the first are ready and knowledgeable. So perform your job in a professional manner to the best of your ability.

And the inspection team's going to do the same and demonstrate what knowledge skills abilities you have while ensuring that you know what to do, why you do it. And how it contributes to the overall wing mission. The other one would the next one be a, so alert. So be alert, show willingness to listen and learn from the onsite inspectors and then I think if the opportunity presents self leverage their knowledge and expertise and methods to generate future success for your area.

The next one would be R, responsive. Win the day. Be attentive, cooperative while working with the IG team. It's pretty simple. And the last one's E, exceptional. Be the Airman or the Department of Air Force civilian who

exceeds expectations performs at an excellent level by being at the right place, right time, right attitude, right answer.

I would leave you with that acronym R. A. R. E. And think about that as you go on throughout the weekend while the inspection team's on ground. So again, Ready and Knowledgeable, Alert, Responsive, Exceptional. And I think we'll farewell.

Julian Hernandez: There you have it. If you take nothing else from this podcast, remember that R. A. R. E.. Mr. Lefleur, thank you so much for taking the time. I know the IG section is working at full capacity with the UEI only a few days away. So I appreciate you taking the time to break away and have this conversation with me and hopefully we've informed the Alamo wing a little bit in preparation for the inspection.

Dirk LaFleur: I really appreciate the opportunity representing my team and their efforts to prepare best we can on behalf and an advocate for the commander as we're just trying to improve all our overall readiness as it pertains to our strategic airlift mission. So thank you for the time today. And it's been a, it's been a pleasure.

Julian Hernandez: If you want a written version of the UEI Survival Guide, we are going to include a link to a document version as part of the show notes for this episode. Those notes are graciously provided by Mr. LaFleur and the IG team.

And now let's get to our announcements real quick.

We mentioned Colonel Jeffrey is taking over as the Alamo Wing's commander. His Assumption of Command Ceremony is set for Sunday of the August UTA. That's August 4th. The ceremony begins at 1300 at the Pfingston Reception Center, which is over on the BMT side of JBSA Lackland. Stay tuned to your military emails for further instructions and information.

The 433rd Airlift Wing Public Affairs Office is beginning to accept nominations for this year's ESGR Boss Lift. For those who may not know, the Boss Lift is an incentive flight for employers of Alamo Wing Reserve. So if your boss is particularly supportive of your work at the 433rd, Or you'd like to give them a glimpse of our mission, you can nominate them. Nomination forms

will be emailed out soon. The Boss Lift is scheduled for Saturday of the September UTA, which is September 14th.

Speaking of the September UTA, that Sunday, September 15th, is the Wing Family Day. So please make sure you have marked your calendars and let your family members know.

Make sure you're checking our wing website, social media pages, the Air Force Connect app, and monthly Alamo flyer for the latest information and announcements ahead of every UTA.

Finally, if you're enjoying this podcast, please leave us a like, subscribe, write us a review, on whichever platform you like to listen on. It really does help us know if we are properly serving you, our listeners. And we are always open to ideas for future episode topics. You can also email us at airliftpodcast@gmail.com if you prefer, again, that was airliftpodcast@gmail.com.

on that note, we are going to wrap up this edition of Ready, Set, Airlift. We appreciate you lending us your ear and hope you have a successful UTA. I've been your host, Julian Hernandez, a member of the 433rd Airlift Wing Public Affairs Team.

Until next time, be well.