TESTing Voice Interview

With SMSgt Roxanna S. Coble,

F-22 *Raptor* Weapons Section Chief

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Murphy: This is John Murphy, Air Force Test Center historian, doing a testing voice interview with MSgt Roxanna S. Cable -- Coble.

Coble: Coble.

Murphy: Coble, I'm sorry. Today is 17 May 2021. It is 10:00 Pacific Daylight Time. So can you provide some personal background info? You know, like how long have you been with test in general? It doesn't necessarily have to be with the center. Maybe some of your educational background or employment interests?

Coble: So this is my second time at Edwards so I'm going on six years this year. I was here 2014 to 2018 as the Weapons Standardization, Loading Standardization Crew lead for the first two years I was here. So that was all B-1, B-2, B-52. The second half of those four years was as the F-16 Weapons Section Chief because, as Weapons, you can move around pretty much to any weapons platform. I left for a couple years, went to Whiteman (AFB, Missouri), came back in 2020 right before the C-word started --

Murphy: Coronavirus.

Coble: Yeah. I came back as the F-22 Section Chief. I've been on three bombers and two fighters in this whole testing time. Which all of them I have been on except for the B-52 prior to coming here. So I had experience on all of them except for that one. My future goals -- I'm getting ready to retire next year and then I'm hoping to apprentice to be a midwife. So 180 degrees away --

Murphy: Oh wow, yeah.

Coble: -- from weapons. Also the first time I was here, I finished my bachelor's degree in 2015, which was Complementary and Alternative Health through Ashford University.

Murphy: Oh, okay. Very good, very good. Just a couple quick questions for you with that. Pardon my ignorance, but so you're here for weapons, but isn't the weapons center of the universe is Eglin?

Coble: It is, but we do a lot of testing over here too. We kind of share depending on what agency needs what. So sometimes we collaborate with Eglin and sometimes they take some weapons testing stuff, sometimes we take some weapons testing stuff.

Murphy: Is that -- do you know is that just a quantity – they don't have time do everything, or we say well, we like that we'll do this. Do you know?

Coble: A little bit of both, maybe, I can't speak on their behalf, but sometimes they are a little busy and we have a lot of the assets out here that they need. So sometimes they just give it to us or we give it to them it just depends.

Murphy: See I didn't know that. I thought weapons, bam, everything. They do it all. I thought they had a monopoly.

Coble: Oh, no. We do a lot of weapons stuff out here. Yeah, pretty fun.

Murphy: All right. Cool. The other one was you mentioned COVID [Corona Virus Disease]. So naturally that was a new paradigm for everybody. Can you go just into a little -- in your area, your little area of the world? How does that effect -- I mean naturally you can't telework.

Coble: Oh, yeah. Well, we kind of did what the whole base did with the blue-silver shifts, but when everything first kicked off and we didn't know how serious it was -- we're responsible for loading the AIM-9 missile. At first they weren't sure if we should even be -- because we load it by hand. There's three of us across the missile and we hold it and load it onto the aircraft. So they weren't even sure if we would be allowed to do that, which at first kind of hindered our capabilities, but once they came down with guidelines saying, you know, obviously do your counter COVID procedures. We did go back to pretty much full up work just splitting the team in half.

Murphy: So just curious, counter COVID procedures on an AIM-9. Are you wiping the whole thing down or is that --

Coble: At first, yes we were, but I meant more towards the counter COVID procedures that the base had put in place such as only if you have to work on an aircraft and you have to be within six feet of each other, obviously the minimum amount of time, so -- but at first yes, they were talking about wiping it down when they weren't sure if it was -- you know, could've spread through touching things.

Murphy: Sure.

Coble: We just had kind of all kinds of ideas of trying to mitigate the threat.

Murphy: But you never did that though, did you?

Coble: Not single-handedly, no.

Murphy: Oh, but it did happen?

Coble: Going back to --

Murphy: Wiping --

Coble: Yeah, wiping --

Murphy: The wiping --

Coble: -- at first was --

Murphy: Really?

Coble: -- what we were doing. On other munitions we didn't have to because we don't use -- we don't load them by hand --

Murphy: By hand. Right. Right.

Coble: Yeah. Now we're not wiping them down anymore once the CDC [Center for Disease Control] put out those guidelines saying it's not really through touch.

Murphy: Right, right. That's good stuff.

Coble: It was a very interesting time over the spring and summer.

Murphy: Yes, I bet. Well, at least you had another year for your retirement. You weren't going out on that note, let's put it that way.

Coble: Right, I'm glad because it would have been a scary time.

Murphy: So can you point to one thing that attracts you to test?

Coble: When I first got here -- I did a base of preference to come here. The first time I got here in 2014, prior to that, I was a tech[nical] school instructor at Sheppard [Air Force Base, Texas]. My husband and I are actually both weapons and so we were at Sheppard teaching and we kind of just said well, where do we want to go? Test kind of interests us because -- interested us. We had never really known anyone to be part of AFMC [Air Force Materiel Command] or AFTC [Air Force Test Center] or anything like that. They had pretty much all of the platforms that we ever worked on and we thought it would be neat to see another piece of the puzzle that pretty much no one in our peripheral -- a very small percentage has ever seen. So once we got here and I started working in the bomber CTF [Combined Test Force] area, he was on the F-16 and they didn't really do a whole lot of testing back then on 16's, but we really had a lot of stuff going on in the bomber upgrade world. Such as like the 1760 IWBU (Internal Weapons Bay Upgrade), the weapons bay upgrade and the B-2 was going through its flex strike upgrades and the B-1 was preparing to do some -- and this isn't classified or anything, but --

Murphy: I hope not. (laughing)

Coble: No, I wouldn't be. You can Google it. The B-1 was getting ready to do some upgrades as well. That came a little bit after my time, but we were preparing for all of that. As soon as I got here, you know, let's hit the ground in hey, you're experienced on these jets, let's flip the coin and do some testing on certain items. From the start -- the early days to -- not all of those projects are done, but the weapons bay upgrade on the B-52 is done. So that was neat to see it from start to finish.

Murphy: Oh, cool. So you mentioned -- I believe in your bio you mentioned that at one point you were working on two different aircrafts at the same time?

Coble: Yes.

Murphy: Wow. Can you talk about that? Was that like -- because I know they have to be -- especially well, bombers and fighters, right?

Coble: Yes.

Murphy: So they have to be so different or are they similar for weapons loading?

Coble: It is different; especially the pace for bombers is a lot slower.

Murphy: Well, not so much the pace. I guess what I mean is the procedure or maybe the -- I don't know the steps or whatever because you got the -- you have to step back and say I'm more

for a bomber then I got to do this, this, this first. So can you talk about how challenging that was.

Coble: So the first two years was strictly 1 just B-1, B-2 and B-52 and all three of them I worked on at the same time, which they have similarities and obviously differences and that can even go down to as per the munition because we have a munition called the JASSM, the Joint Air to Surface Standoff Munition. Let's make sure that's the right acronym.

Murphy: Okay, I think that's --

Coble: J-A-S-S-M. That's the AGM-158, that's the actual designation but between even the B-1 and the B-52, there are procedural differences in loading it even though it's still going on a bomber. It's still going on a weapons rack that has a 30-inch lug spacing. So that's interesting because you have to get out all the right tools. You got to remember what jet needs what and you work with a crew of people, three other people, so there's four people on your crew so you kind of all have to have each other's backs. Like, hey this bomb, even though it's a JDAM [Joint Direct Attack Munition], a bunker buster, whatever munition we're loading that day, it has different fusing procedures, it has different checks that you have to do on it. So you really need to have a sharp crew in order to make sure that you don't miss anything because it's possible. No one else in the CAF [Combat Air Force], they don't ever work on more than one platform at a time. So it's dumping a gallon into a shot glass at -- sometimes.

Murphy: Wow.

Coble: And to top that off, because we were in weapons standardization over there in building 1600, they standardize all the weapons procedures for the base and we had got a call. Well, not just a call, but it was a contract for the weapons standardization folks to go out to plant 42 because at that time was the F-15 Saudi Advanced Program out there. So we were loading on four different platforms at once and developing procedures for all of these platforms, so all three bombers and the F-15 SA -- that was a very unique time of a weapons troop's life. It was a lot.

Murphy: In an operational weapons squadron, is that -- would they be designated like this team just works on B-1's, this team works on F-16? That's how they're delineated, right?

Coble: Yeah. There's -- like Nellis [Air Force Base, NV], they're kind of similar to us because they have all different fighters over there. But yes, they would only work on an F-16 at one time or let's say you were in Aviano [Air Base, Italy]. You only have F-16's, though. Any other base that only has one type of aircraft, you usually just stick to that aircraft even though we are allowed to work on different platforms. It's unheard of for very many people to come and work on all these different jets all at once.

Murphy: Yeah, that's an attractive -- attraction right there.

Coble: Yeah, it's pretty awesome because you can go through your whole career and as a weapons troop only work on maybe three, four if you're lucky. I've had -- let's 1 see, let me go through the timeline -- B-1, F-16 -- this is from when I joined the Air Force. B-1, F-16, F-15, F-

22, back to B-1, B-2, B-52 at tech school. B-1, B-2, B-52, F-16, F-15 SA at Edwards, F-22 again at Edwards. So like seven or eight different platforms.

Murphy: Yeah.

Coble: That's like a record almost.

Murphy: Wow.

Coble: Yeah.

Murphy: And you're going to leave it? No.

Coble: Instead of downloading bombs, I'll download babies.

Murphy: Yeah, true. So just out of curiosity bombers, fighters, do you have a preference or are they about the same for you?

Coble: If I had to pick my favorite bomber, it would be the B-1 and my favorite fighter would probably be the F-15. But if I had to pick one or the other just in general -- because I worked on a handful of both.

Murphy: Sure. Well if you don't have preference, you don't have --

Coble: I don't really --

Murphy: -- one that's fine.

Coble: They're both awesome and I always encourage people who have only been on the fighter track hey, go check out bombers, it's not forever. Spend three four years on a bomber and go back to fighters if you don't like bombers just to get the experience because --

Murphy: Right.

Coble: -- there's no better feeling than, you know, as a young Airman I was at Ellsworth [Air Force Base, South Dakota] on the B-1 and loading up 84, Mark 82's takes you an entire shift. You have that comradery and competition with other crews because usually on a B-1 you have to have a backup aircraft because they're known to break. So a couple different crews would load up a couple different aircraft and so you kind of want to see who's faster and who's better. So I try to tell the guys, go to bombers see if you like it because we're retiring a lot of bombers and getting new bombers. So we'll see what happens. Let them go decide which ones they like better.

Murphy: Cool, very good. So how did your initial involvement in the test enterprise affect your personal or professional ambitions?

Coble: Development -- passion definitely increased. Like I said, seeing especially that internal weapons bay upgrade on the B-52, that was really neat because we kind of watched it be the actual CRL (Conventional Rotary Launcher) that holds the eight bombs get built. The engineers -- weapons engineers were making sure that everything was in the right place. We had

measurements we had to take and stuff like that. Pretty much for my personal ambitions it made me want to see the step of everything. If I wasn't necessarily involved in that step I would want to know what are you doing when you give it back to me so that I can continue on my path.

Murphy: Okay. Good. So can you share some of your most memorable experiences working out there with your bombers and fighters?

Coble: So 2017 was the 70th anniversary of Edward's supersonic flight at the Air Force Ball. I was on the committee to kind of get everything in place over in hanger 1600 so we had the SR-71 come in, which we had never done that before. So that was neat, that's also my husband's favorite aircraft even though he's never got to work on it. It's such a cool aircraft, you know? So for him to actually see it not out at the museum, he was excited about that. And seeing Chuck Yeager there was really cool, but probably my most memorable experience outside of the 70th anniversary was I got an incentive flight on an F-16 when I was working over there it was aircraft 377. I won an annual award so that was my -- I guess that was my award, really. That was the first incentive flight I'd ever had because a lot of people don't get them. So we got to break the sound barrier, which you can't really hear while you're in the jet because obviously you're going faster than --

Murphy: It doesn't shake or nothing?

Coble: No, you just see the speed on the screen and you're like well, that's faster than the speed of sound.

Murphy: Oh, okay. Wow, that's interesting.

Coble: And we flew through Star Wars Canyon up there by Death Valley too, which is very famous. So that's probably the best experience I've had.

Murphy: Cool. Wow. That is memorable. Okay. So looking back, if you know -- if you knew then what you know now, would you still want to work in test?

Coble: Yes. It's good to see what we get in the field -- where does that come from? You know, you always wonder someone wrote this TO [Technical Order] like a crazy person, why would they put this in here? Why would they put the steps in this order? But when you're here and you get to develop things like that or have inputs to the people who write the TO's or you're developing a product that, you know, a TO needs to be written for and you're part of that process. It just kind of comes full circle to --like oh, well I can see why they wrote it like this, but it doesn't really fit. Then coming into test, you know that it's your job to make sure that the person in the field will utilize that TO. You want to write it to the best of your abilities so they can use it properly. It's pretty neat to say you've been in test, especially six years. Some people have been longer than me, but it's definitely something if I knew then what I knew now, yes, I would still come back.

Murphy: So now, just for clarity, you're testing the loading of the weapon?

Coble: Yes and not just the loading, but there's certain like -- we call them OFP's, (Operational Flight Plans) which is like a computer program to make sure that the weapon talks to the aircraft

and back and forth. So when they upgrade the OFP's we have to make sure that the weapon still works. We also develop certain like -- a pylon or something like that that may pull the -- a munition that we've already had in the inventory, but the pylon is new. So not just testing the weapon, but anything between the aircraft system and the equipment that the weapons go on.

Murphy: So do you readily get these results or do you have to run them down?

Coble: It takes a while. Sometimes you won't see the end of the program, if that's what you mean, because like Eglin would take it for example. Sometimes we also -- most recently we have a new cradle to hold a munition and we're kind of testing that cradle out to make sure that it has durability and you can use it for more than one missile. It really just depends I guess. That's not really a good answer, but --

Murphy: Any answer is a good answer.

Coble: Yeah, it just depends on what it is.

Murphy: Okay. All right. Good, good. So, again, in your area, do you see any collaboration within the enterprise -- maybe not, maybe that's not a good question for you -- but maybe Eglin? I don't know. Do you see any collaboration between like Eglin and here for weapons testing?

Coble: Last year we had to go -- not had to go, we went to Eglin on a TDY [Temporary Duty] and we brought all of our material that we needed because we're ready to do a big test. So that was kind of like a bed down to see if we could -- our footprint fit in there at Eglin. Collaboration not just with Eglin, but like I work in the Raptor CTF right now and there's Air Force civilians, there's contractors, there's military. Both officer and enlisted over there, Boeing is over there too. We all have Lockheed, Boeing, military, civilian -- we all work our magic together to get the jets off the ground into the air. So not only with them, but we have other agencies across the U.S. that we work with such as -- we have a tester. They're based in Orlando. We also have some field reps [representatives] at Nellis. Right now we're borrowing one of Nellis' jets since, I think, 2019 for some upgrades and testing. Also in the Raptor CTF we have the oldest F-22's in existence. They're using them to continually do upgrades to fields. So all kinds of collaboration all the time.

Murphy: Well, okay. Well, there you go. I'm sorry just for my situational awareness, you said a tester?

Coble: I'm sorry, like a box that we use to test on the aircraft to make sure –

Murphy: Oh, not a person?

Coble: No, no, no. I'm sorry.

Murphy: That's okay.

Coble: It's like a piece of equipment that we hook up cables to the aircraft and make sure that the (indiscernible) system is --

Murphy: That will tell you if the test is successful?

Coble: Yeah. So we have like scheduled maintenance that we do on the aircraft. So every 180 days we have to hook up. We call it the COLT tester, Common Organizational Level Tester and it just runs through all the different weapon stations and makes sure that everything is connected and we don't have any like missile degrades or infinite ohms, or something like that.

Murphy: Great, thanks. So if there was one thing that you could change tomorrow and you can be perfectly blunt, what would it be?

Coble: I thought long and hard about this question because there's, you know --

Murphy: If there's more than one, you know --

Coble: Well, I did narrow it down to one because we might be here all day.

Murphy: Oh, wow.

Coble: One thing -- and this is not really test specific, it's location specific. It would be either to move Edwards, which we can't really do that, we're very remote as you know. I live on base, you don't live on base I'm assuming.

Murphy: I'm in Rosamond.

Coble: Yeah. So you're driving ex amount miles every week, but I would like to be in a more populated area. So that's my one thing that's probably -- you were looking more towards a test answer, but --

Murphy: Yeah. No, that's fine if that's -- oh wow. Okay. Cool. But the first time -- I guess the first time you were here, did you know how isolated it was?

Coble: I did.

Murphy: Oh, you did?

Coble: I did because there was one guy that we worked with and he had been here before as an Airman so it had been quite an amount of years since he'd been here. He let us know that it was in the middle of nowhere and --

Murphy: But you came back.

Coble: I blame my husband. (laughing)

Murphy: Ah, I got it.

Coble: No, we came back because he got a good job opportunity over in B-21. We couldn't pass that up because --

Murphy: No.

Coble: -- that's the future.

Murphy: Yeah. So I guess you'll probably end of staying here for a while?

Coble: We're looking, we don't know yet.

Murphy: Maybe head down toward LA [Los Angeles] or something. If you want people, that's where they are.

Coble: So many jobs here at Edwards once you retire.

Murphy: True, true.

Coble: So we're not sure yet.

Murphy: No, I like that answer. Very good, thank you. So in the research development -- I'm sorry, I think I spelled it wrong -- research development test and evaluation, yes. What have you seen as the greatest challenge in your area?

Coble: Well, we have a small piece of the puzzle in the big picture, but my biggest challenge is that we get new Airman who come here from tech school as a three level. They've learned everything about the aircraft that a three level would learn that you would be required to perform in the field, but when they come here it's like when Alice goes in the tree trunk and she flips upside down --

Murphy: Right.

Coble: That happens to them and it's such a challenge to them because there are certain things that we would normally have to train them on in the CAF that they can't train on here such as an F-22 gun, we don't have any guns in our aircraft because it's full of instrumentation. So in order for them to shove more instrumentation in there they have to take the guns out. Also, we don't do wash rack on our aircrafts, for the 22 specifically, and that's something that is required of them in their upgrade training. I'm just speaking F-22 specifically, but you know, other aircraft -- there's certain things that we don't do like -- well, going back to the F-1 22, just in general you're supposed to learn about aircraft forms, but we don't have certain aircraft forms here. So they spend their time here and they get into the nuances of test and let's say they become a staff sergeant over the three or four years that they are here and they go out to the field and they're expected to know the forms, how to do wash rack, how to --

Murphy: Which they don't do.

Coble: -- schedule things. Yeah. We have a lot of things here that -- especially in F-22's -- that we as enlisted don't do here because Lockheed has the contracts for the jets, Boeing has the contracts for the jets. So they're behind the power curve when they leave here because they don't have any quote, unquote real world experience. So I believe that three levels should not come here because it hinders them in the future.

Murphy: Right.

Coble: They get a great view and saturation of tests, but that's a small piece of our job, especially as they continue in their careers.

Murphy: What would you say is the percentage of three levels in your area? Is it –

Coble: Well, in just F-22's, it's maybe five or ten percent.

Murphy: Okay. Very minimal.

Coble: Yeah, but over in F-16's, I would say out of 50 people, they probably have ten three levels. That's just a rough estimate.

Murphy: Yeah, yeah, sure. Interesting.

Coble: So that's my biggest challenge is to train them up specifically for test. Instead of, you know, we don't do everything that would normally be done. If someone came here fully qualified as, let's say, a five level, then we could immerse them into test a lot easier.

Murphy: Yeah, sure. I wasn't aware of any of that.

Coble: Yeah.

Murphy: So as you may be aware, the new Chief Staff of the Air Force has a philosophy of accelerate change, or lose. How do you think that could be best applied to test?

Coble: Well, when General Teichert [Brig Gen John E., 412th Test Wing Commander] -- unfortunately I didn't get to meet him because that was our small stint at Whiteman. So when we found out we were coming back we were like, yeah General Teichert, he's changing everything and he had that video -- he liked to do those Facebook videos and he was saying like if you see any AFI's [Air Force Instructions] out there that you think are not as useful as they could be, tell me which ones they are and I'll write a waiver. It's waiver season, or --

Murphy: Oh, wow.

Coble: -- whatever he said. I feel like we were doing the accelerate change, or lose before General Brown delivered it to the whole Air Force. He was obviously wanting that to be applied to the whole enterprise, but I feel like at Edwards we've already been doing that. We also had the -- Eddie's idea, Dragon initiative, and we're kind of able to make changes easier than the CAF because we're test that's our job, so we definitely were applying that here well before his philosophy was fielded to the Air Force and I think that's cool because we're not bound in black and white. We're kind of in the grey area of we're allowed to do this to see if it works or not so we can get it to the black and white.

Murphy: Right, right, or maybe he took on that philosophy because he saw what we're doing here?

Coble: That could be.

Murphy: I don't know that for sure, but --

Coble: Yeah.

Murphy: -- it sounds like a good talking point.

Coble: Yeah. We have things -- we've done things that other bases or maybe other services said couldn't be done. Like our mock PT [physical training] test we can -- obviously PT tests have been on hold for quite a while, but the first couple weeks of the month, if you go and take your PT test and you don't like your score or you didn't meet the minimum score, you can redo it and when you redo it and you like that score then it counts. So that takes a lot of stress off of Airmen and that's not just here at Edwards, that's AFMC, so I think that's amazing. We also got the scooter program for the Airmen you've probably seen them outside of --

Murphy: I've seen them. I'm not sure how they work, but --

Coble: Yeah. So if you don't have a car, that's a long walk, or always hoofing a ride with someone. Actually, my daughters and I tried them out this weekend because it's just an app[lication] you just go on and sign up and they're pretty fun.

Murphy: Are they?

Coble: Yeah. You know, it's a Sunday at Edwards, what's there to do here? Yeah, we just rented them for about half an hour and zipped over to the gym and zipped back. It was a good idea to get them. I think that was Chief Ishen's [Chief Master Sergeant Ian D. Eishen, 412th Test Wing command Chief] vision. I'm not sure how many Airmen utilize them, but I think it's pretty cool.

Murphy: So from what you're saying -- I mean the accelerate change, or lose is still going on here. Do you -- have you thought about or do you see anything that maybe they could do that they're not thinking about, that they're not doing right now in that area?

Coble: Well, we do have developing technologies that we hear of our adversaries developing. So we're kind of in a race and I'm not sure what their accelerate change, or lose strategy looks like, but I think for us to say on top of them there's many avenues that we've gone down or are thinking about going down. We just have to get the resources and the buyoff from our leadership to be able to do those things. There's pretty much -- I hope that vision continues after General Brown because we shouldn't always be bound to black and white if there's a better way that we can do things.

Murphy: Right. Okay, great. Did I miss anything? Is there -- do you want to make any additional comments?

Coble: No, not that I can think of. Just I have to get you the acronym for the JASSM. If you want --

Murphy: Oh, I can find that, yeah.

Coble: AGM-158.

Murphy: Also, you say CAF is C-A-F?

Coble: Yeah, Combat Air Force.

Murphy: Oh, okay.

Coble: That's basically saying the field. Like the end users.

Murphy: Got it.

Coble: So I think that's it.

Murphy: Yeah, you feel good?

Coble: Yes.

Murphy: Okay.

Coble: That was fun.

Murphy: Well, thank you. I'm glad you had fun. This concludes the interview.