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**Lt. Gen. Robert J. Elder: Team building, coaching the nation's defense of the cyber world**

December 30, 2007

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When Lt. Gen. Robert Elder Jr. flies commercially, grandmother types sometimes ask him if he plans to make a career of the Air Force. He teases them and tells them he is thinking about it.

A three-star general, Elder has more than 4,000 flying hours, including 83 combat hours. He is commander of the "Mighty Eighth" and was responsible for getting the Air Force's cyber warfare program up and running. He has served in the Air Force since the Vietnam War and has definitely made a career of it. "I was always interested in flying — that was the initial attraction," he said. "I actually came in during the Vietnam War. I thought that if I was going to be in the war, I would rather be flying than on the ground. I stayed in because I liked it. It turned out to be a lifestyle that suited me well."

His proudest accomplishment to date involves the cyber capabilities of the Air Force; the very thing that has had the region all aflutter for over a year as both a new mission for Barksdale AFB and for the economic spinoff for the community with new, high-paying defense industry jobs.

"We basically stood up the cyber capabilities in the Air Force in less than a year," said Elder. "It was in November of last year they called and said to set up and we had pretty good capabilities by June. To me, in terms of being able to pull all that together so fast, that is a great accomplishment right here."

Elder believes the military attracts people who like to be leaders. It gives people the opportunity, due to the frequent relocations, to be in a variety of leadership situations and develop a leadership style.

Elder said his is a team builder/coach style.

"I like to develop a strategy and then work with a group," he said. "The whole idea of leadership is that you are trying to move everyone in the same direction. Bring all the people on and make it not just my idea but their idea."

Elder's work getting Cyber Command up and running at Barksdale meant he was frequently explaining complex issues to people without a technical or military background. He gets high marks for that skill. "I'm an engineer by training and have been in jobs where I would try to get nontechnical people to understand technical things. It just takes time. If you are trying to get your message across, the key is to put it in terms they would understand."

Elder has worked closely with area officials to prepare the area for the Cyber Command. His work has not gone unnoticed and his inclusiveness is appreciated by many.

"If you go back and look at Air Force history, one of the things that allowed the Air Force to grow was its close partnership with industries and communities," he said. "When I first went to the city and said it (operational Cyber Command) was coming, they asked what they could do to help. I said the best way"» is to develop capabilities so I can partner with you. Cyber, in particular, is not something that affects only military, it is military and civilian. For me to be totally effective, it is going to be important to have military and civilian elements. I told them it was an opportunity for them, and having (the capability) would be helpful for me. This community was uniquely suited to support my mission at 8th Air Force."

**Born: Oct. 22, 1952.**

Residence: Bossier City/ Detroit, Mich.  
 Profession: Commander, 8th Air Force, Barksdale AFB, and Joint Functional Component Commander for Global Strike and Integration, U.S. Strategic Command, Offutt AFB, Neb.  
 Education: (partial list) bachelor's degree in electrical engineering, University of Detroit.; master's degree in engineering, University of Detroit; doctor of engineering, University of Detroit.  
 Family: Wife, Bess; daughter, Katie.  
 Best piece of advice received and from whom: "It was the late 70s or early 80s and I was a captain. I was working on my doctorate and had this opportunity to do some flying things I really wanted to do, but it would have meant delaying the work on my doctorate. My squadron commander recommended I not start deviating off until I finished the doctorate. As it was, it took me 10 years to finish. If I hadn't done that, then I wouldn't be setup to do the kind of work I am doing now. It was 30 years ago that a mid-level officer said 'get the education.'"

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