

A glowing green padlock is centered on the left side of the image. It has a textured, pixelated appearance and is surrounded by a network of glowing blue and white lines that resemble a circuit board or a digital map. The background is dark with a complex pattern of these glowing lines.

Secure Home Surveillance System Project

Hayden Phifer

About Me

6-year journey to bachelor's degree

- Changed majors 5 times
- When we realized getting a degree in 4 years wasn't realistic, my father told me to find a way to pay for college myself

Enlisted in the Army National Guard

- Needed to find way to support myself and pay for college

Returned after basic training and chose the fastest degree to finish: Aviation Management

- Not my first choice, but it would get me out of college ASAP

Reality check around graduation time

- Aviation career options did not fit my interests or passions, would have hated working in the industry

Immediate pivot to graduate school to realign into IT

- Graduate Certificate in Cybersecurity Management completed in May
- Master of Science in Information Management finishing in December

Continued service and upskilling

- Renewed Guard contract with path to retrain as Cyber Operations Specialist to further align my experience with IT
- Spent summer studying for and passing CompTIA's Security+ exam



Brief Overview

- Designed and Implemented a secure, local-only surveillance system
- Performs continuous video recording and automated backup/retention with no cloud dependence
- Remote viewing is only possible through encrypted VPN access, not through the internet or commercial vendor servers
- The system is designed to recover from failures automatically

Why I Chose This Project

I wanted a surveillance system that keeps footage local-only and privately controlled

Most commercial camera systems require

- Paid subscriptions
- Mandatory cloud storage
- No user-friendly customization or local retention options

Major vendors have had massive privacy failures, proving that cloud \neq secure

- [Ring doorbell illegally surveilled customers](#)
- [Verkada failed to secure cloud video storage](#)
- [Amazon keeps recordings forever, despite deletion requests](#)

If I want privacy, I shouldn't have to give my data to someone else

Project Goals

- Private networked camera system with no internet access
- Store minimum of 24hrs of footage on 10+ year old PC I had in storage
- Remotely view the live footage, but not the stored footage
- Spend as LITTLE money as possible





HARDWARE

Camera



What I looked for in my camera

Open Network
Video Interface
Forum and Real
Time Streaming
Protocol

Able to function
entirely offline

No mandatory
subscriptions or
cloud dependence

Locally controlled

Low cost



Reolink E1 Pro

Old Personal Computer

- Alienware X51 R3 from 2015
 - CPU: i7-7600
 - RAM: 16GB DDR4 @ 2133MHz
 - GPU: NVIDIA GTX 745
 - Old, but works for basic hardware encoding options
 - OS: Windows 10 Home → Windows 10 IOT Edition
 - Had to change editions with the sunset of official windows 10 support and security updates
 - Storage pool: 2TB hybrid drive
 - 12-14.5 days of maximum continuous recording
 - Power: small UPS with approximately 10 minutes of battery backup
 - Security: Bitlocker encrypted drive with maximum password length



Router

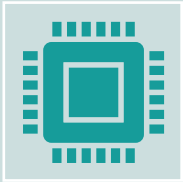
- What I looked for in a router
 - Can create isolated Virtual Local Area Networks
 - Physically and logically separate camera system from rest of home network
 - Supports WireGuard VPN
 - Faster, modern, more secure VPN with lowest overhead compared to older OpenVPN/IPSec standards
 - Complete control over my own network traffic and enterprise-level customization options
 - Stop the camera from being able to stream or be accessed from outside the network
 - See and analyze logs to ensure that nothing does leave the network
 - Can also handle the rest of my household wifi traffic
 - This was more than just a purchase I made for my project, the router would have to be able to support my entire network
- Ubiquiti's Unifi Dream Router 7





SOFTWARE

Router



Purpose

Network Segmentation: Put camera on isolated VLAN with nothing except PC running OBS

Firewall Policy: Restrict camera access to internet and other VLANs

DHCP/DNS Control: Reserved static lease for camera so RTSP URL and OBS source never changed

WireGuard VPN: Created a WireGuard profile for my phone to reach the LAN privately and securely



Key Settings

Network: Separate VLAN for home surveillance network, DHCP reservation

Firewall: Blocking all connections from camera to WAN (except to ntp server), block all connections from surveillance network to other networks and vice versa, block all access to camera from WAN.

local camera

Name
local camera

Source Zone ⓘ
Internal

☐ Any ☒ Device ☐ Network ☐ IP ☐ MAC

×

Edit (1)

Port ⓘ
☒ Any ☐ Specific ☐ List

Action ⓘ
☒ Block ☐ Allow ☐ Reject ⓘ

Destination Zone ⓘ
External

☒ Any ☐ App ☐ IP ☐ Domain ☐ Region

Port ⓘ
☒ Any ☐ Specific ☐ List

IP Version ⓘ
☒ Both ☐ IPv4 ☐ IPv6

Protocol ⓘ
☒ All ☐ TCP/UDP ☐ TCP ☐ UDP
☐ Custom

Connection State ⓘ
☒ All ☐ Return Traffic ⓘ ☐ Custom

☐ Match IPsec ⓘ

☒ Syslog Logging ⓘ

Schedule ⓘ
☒ Always ☐ Daily ☐ Weekly ☐ One Time
☐ Custom

Open Broadcaster Software (OBS) Studio



Overview

Free, open-source recorder and streamer

Can ingest RTSP feeds, screen recordings, media files, web browsers, audio inputs, and more

Allows plugins and has the option to stream, edit, and record source content



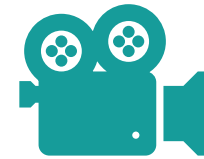
Why It Was Chosen

Easy to use with a small number of camera

Familiarity with the program from past interactions, and user-friendly interface

No overly complex setup and use like fuller NVR suites

Plenty of options with how to record and encode video



How It Was Used

Camera RTSP stream was added as a media source

Records as .mkv files so that any interruptions would not affect the entire video (unlike .mp4)

Open-source plugin added to ensure that stream refreshes periodically to prevent freezing

Cobian Reflector



At A Glance

- A backup scheduling tool that can run as a service
- Supports per-task encryption
- Retention by number of full copies rather than by age.
- Supports pre or post task events
- Has the ability to not touch in-progress/in-use files

Why It Was Chosen

- Could automate encryption and backup of OBS recordings
- Could run in the background as a service
- Can prune old data sets and prevent casual users from accessing files

Configuration and Use

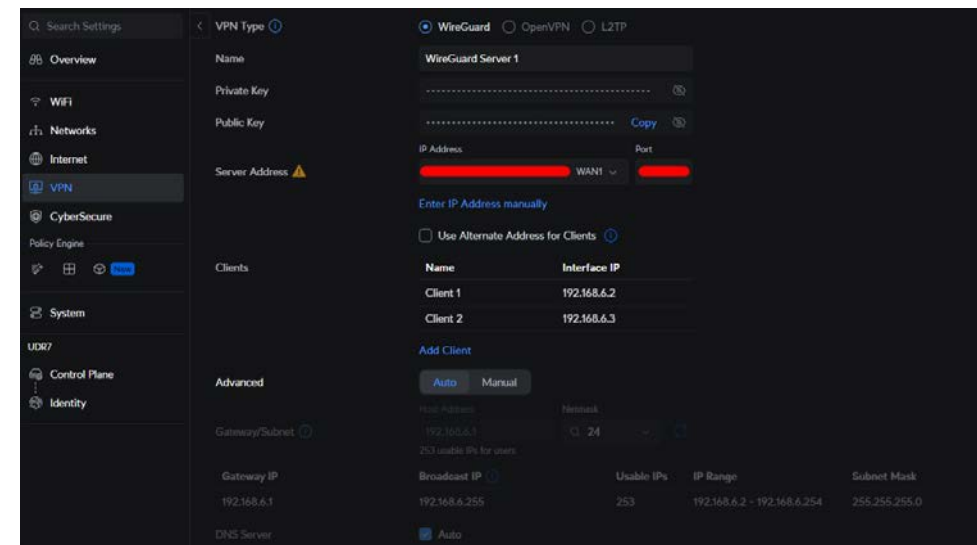
- Service Mode: Installed and run as a Windows Service for reliability without requiring logon
- Target and Security: Wrote to a dedicated vault folder on a fixed-letter drive with BitLocker enabled
- Task Options: No compression, AES-128 bit encryption, Volume Shadow Copy disabled, file named as date/time
- Schedule: Short timer corresponding to OBS segments to ensure that videos are immediately moved and encrypted
- Retention: Keeps 7 days worth of footage (168 one-hour OBS segments), deletes source after successful backup

Wireguard VPN

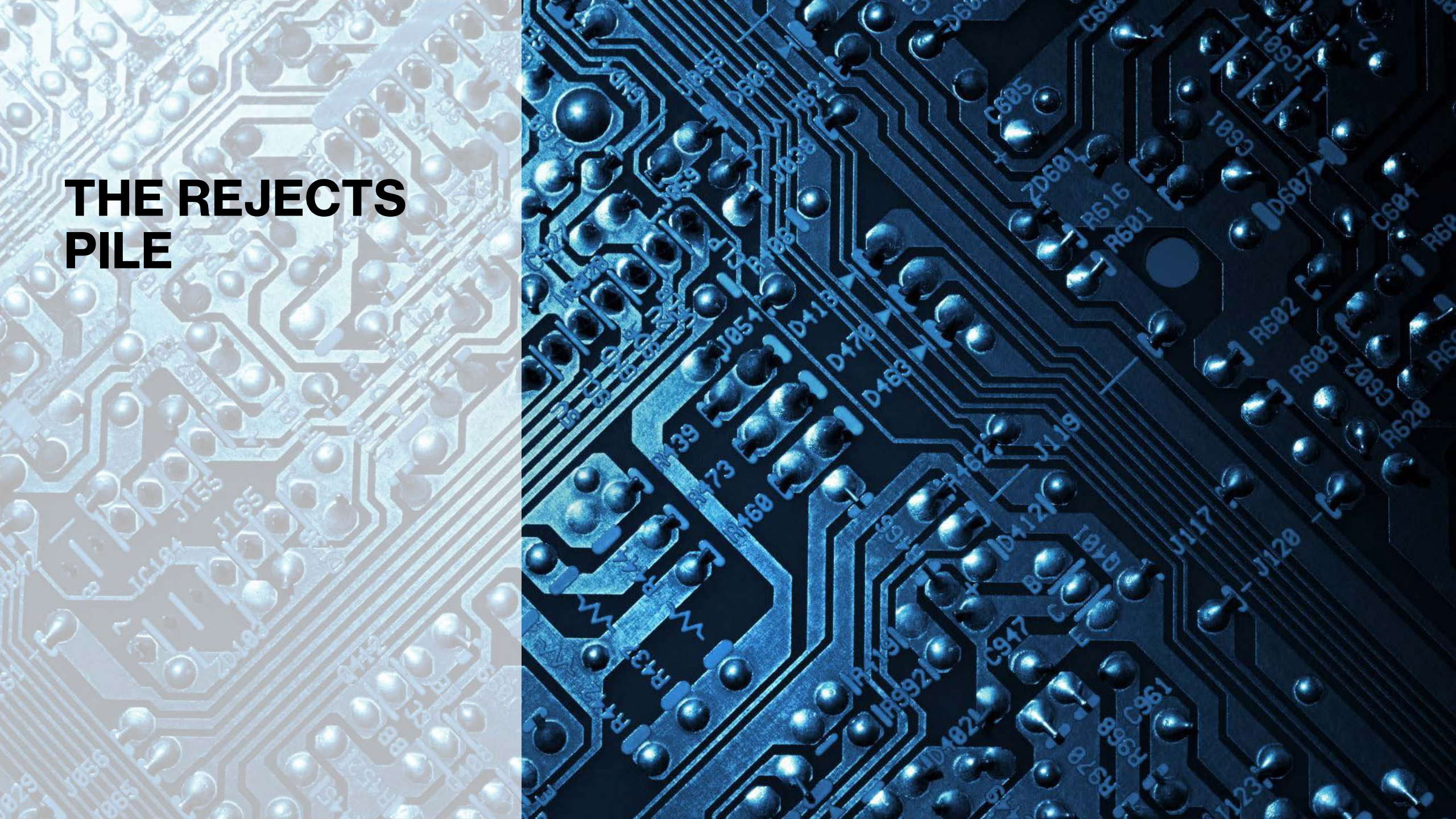
- Overview
 - Modern, fast, secure, low-overhead VPN with smaller attack surface and simple onboarding
- Why It Was Selected
 - Runs natively on my Unifi router
 - Secure access to my network without exposing it to the public
 - Performs better and is easier to setup on mobile than OpenVPN or IPSec
- Use and Configuration

```
[Interface]
PrivateKey = [REDACTED]
Address = 192.168.6.4/32
DNS = 192.168.6.1

[Peer]
PublicKey = [REDACTED]
AllowedIPs = 0.0.0.0/0
Endpoint = [REDACTED]
```



THE REJECTS PILE



Software DVRs

AGENT DVR

What is Agent DVR?

- Windows-centric NVR with browser UI for live view and playback
- Works with most IP cameras via RTSP or ONVIF

Why I Rejected it

- Struggled to connect it to the camera via RTSP
- Couldn't stream without paying
- If I paid, stream wouldn't be secure and would be viewable to anyone who probed my network

SHINOBI

What is Shinobi?

- Open-source NVR designed for Linux
- Works with most IP cameras via RTSP and ONVIF
- Can only be installed on Windows via Docker

Why I Rejected it?

- Complex setup
- Lack of a true "set it and forget it" workflow
- Clunky UI and issues connecting the camera
- Required other software to run
- Lack of secure streaming option for phone

Routers

Spectrum

Wave 2-SAC2V1A

Free ISP-
Provided Router

No customization
options

Locked to single
VLAN

Wifi 5 Only

Could not choose
between 2.4GHz
and 5GHz
networks

ASUS RT-AX1800S

Cheap Router

No way to block
devices from
accessing internet

Very poor logs

Wifi 6

Locked to a singular
VLAN

No VPN

ASUS RT-BE58U

Medium cost Router

Still no way to block devices from accessing
internet

Still very lucklaster logs

Wifi 7

Allowed creation of multiple VLANs, but no
individual customization or control options

Had built-in VPN options

Secure Streaming Software

JAMI

What is Jami?

- Free, open-source, peer-to-peer messenger for text, voice, and video
- End-to-end encryption
- No centralized server

Why Did I Initially Choose It?

- Fits privacy and security model: E2EE, no cloud storage, easy to setup, comes with app for both PC and iPhone

Why Did I Reject It?

- It was not a RTSP client, usage depended on screen sharing from PC
- My old PC couldn't handle doing recording with OBS, viewing with VLC media player, video calling with Jami, and encrypting/backups all at the same time
- Didn't enjoy using the app

OBS STUDIO + EXTERNAL SITE

OBS Studio

- Already using it to record
- Could also use it to stream with little additional overhead

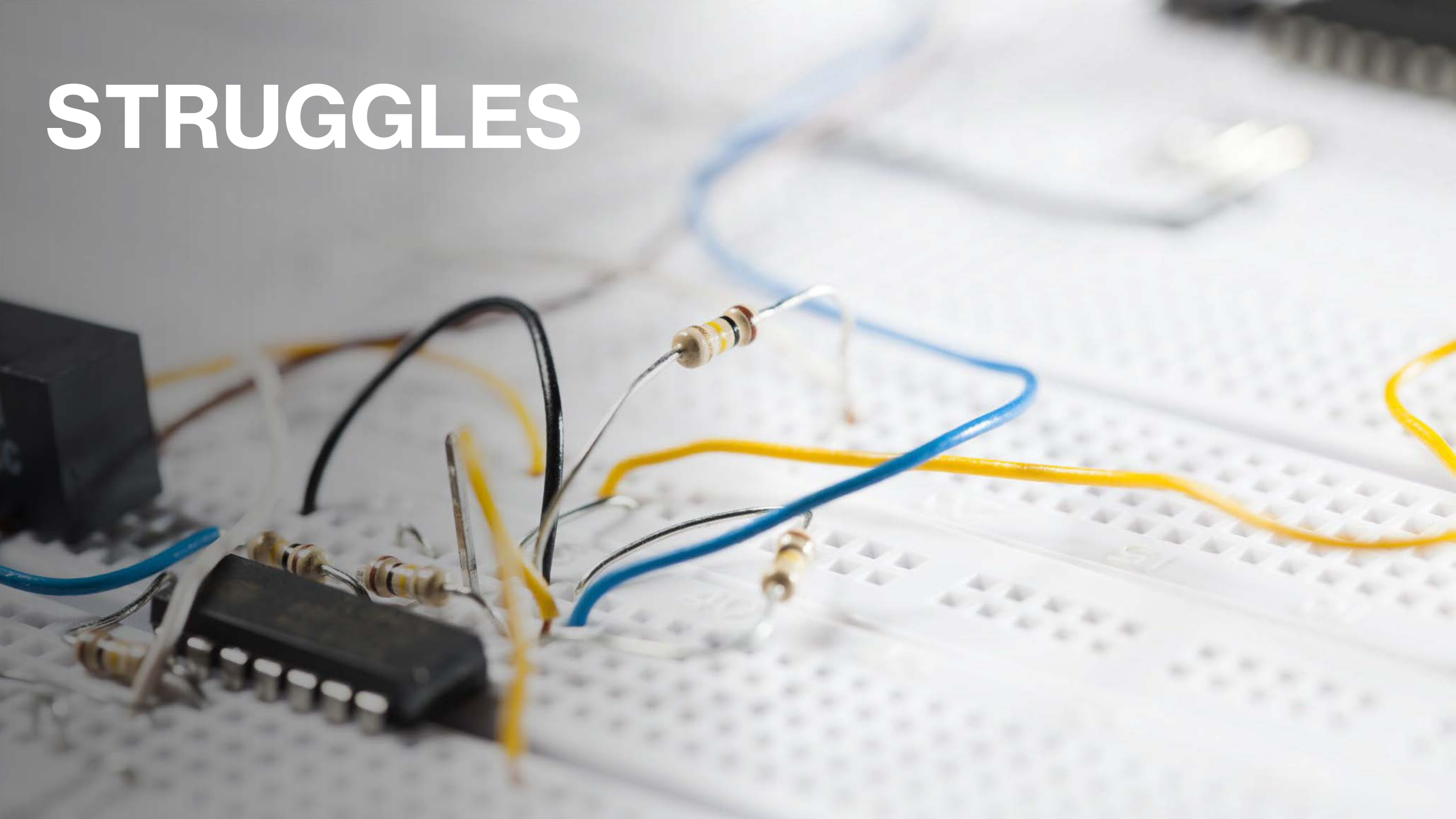
Stream to My Own Domain

- I already have my own domain, but no hardware
- Could buy/subscribe to cloud computing, but would still be entrusting my data to a third party
- Public exposure of the stream and of my home network if misconfigured

Stream to YouTube

- Could stream as either unlisted (no security, but I'm the only person with the link) or private (only people signed into google accounts that I authorize could view)
- Has DVR so I could pause, rewind, and fast forward through livestream for up to 12 hours of footage
- Stores my video on YouTube's servers
- Is against YouTube's terms of service

STRUGGLES



OBS Issues

Long-running RTSP sessions would randomly stall; OBS kept last good frame on screen instead of auto-recovering

- Tried to force reliable RTSP over TCP with longer timeouts, but that didn't fix it
 - Ffmpeg option: `rtsp_transport=tcp rtsp_flags=prefer_tcp timeout=20000000 rw_timeout=20000000`
- Reduced buffering, set reset delay, allowed unlimited retries, changed rendering and encoding methods, etc. - but none of it worked
- Finally installed an OBS plugin that allowed me to refresh the media source every 5 minutes to fix any frozen frame issues

So many settings and customization options, it took weeks to test everything out and determine the optimal settings for my setup

- How many frames per second
- What resolution
- What type of media source to use
- Researching all the different encoder settings
- What filetype to record in

Selection Issues



Camera

Had to sift through hundreds of cheap cameras on amazon and decide on the best one based on the limited budget I gave myself



Router

Took 4 routers and lots of research before I finally discovered a router that actually did everything I needed

Companies frequently mislead or withheld information about router capabilities and abilities



NVR Software

Sifting through multiple different free and/or open-sourced options took a long time, and a lot of trial and error setting up

Got tired of trying to use all-in-one suites so I broke it up into the 3 functions I needed: recording, encrypted storage, and secure streaming



Remote Viewing Method

Thousands of apps that could have been used, hundreds with E2EE video calls/feeds, very few that could work unattended, even fewer that had methods of ensuring that only intended recipients could see camera feed

Wanted to use my own domain, but ultimately ran into an issue with equipment cost, the time it would take to setup my own equipment for this function, or trusting someone else to host everything

Secure Storage Issues

- Kept deleting files that were in-use until I did more research
- Takes a lot of processing power to encrypt and store videos
- Hundreds of folders created for backups

Cobian
Reflector



- Had to adjust video length from 24 hours (7 neatly categorized videos) to hour long videos for Cobian Reflector
- Anyone can theoretically walk in and view/delete the video currently in progress
 - Trade off between .mkv and .mp4 files → resiliency vs security

Storage



- No way to encrypt the video recordings in real time

Encryption



Cost Issues



Camera

Cheaper camera will overheat after a few days of continuous use
Wi-Fi cuts out briefly (long enough to interrupt OBS recording)
LAN was only possible AFTER setting camera up in the cloud



NVR

Full-service NVRs that could do everything I wanted (Blue Iris, ZoneMinder, etc) were no longer an option
Had to use multiple different programs instead of an all-in-one solution



Storage

Had to use free Cobian Reflector instead of a paid backup/encryption solution
Had to configure settings in Cobian Reflector, OBS, and Windows to make it work



Remote Viewing

Hard to find free options that didn't want to view/use my video or that wouldn't be illegal to use
Many VPN services require payment

Lessons Learned

“Trust but verify” does not apply in the realm of privacy

Network logs show camera tried to send data to hundreds of IPs

Don’t always choose the first option

I’ve learned to keep researching to find the best option instead of the easiest option

Low budgets cost time

A higher budget would have allowed me to complete this project within a week, but instead it took months to research how to bring everything together to perform the task that a single paid software could have done

It’s more fun to learn by doing than learn by researching, but a lot less informative

While it was fun to play around with different software and settings at first, I found that without reading the product documentation or understanding the concepts behind it, that I struggled to make everything come together because I lacked key pieces of information

PRODUCT DEMONSTRATION



OBS Software

OBS Studio 30.0.1 - Profile: Default - Scene: Default

File Edit View Docks Profile Scene Collection Tools Help

Media Source

Stats

CPU Usage	11%	FPS	25.00
Disk space available	905.2 GB	Average time to render frame	1.1 ms
Disk full in (approx.)	158 Hours, 33 Minutes	Frames missed due to rendering lag	5 / 41057355 (0.0%)
Memory Usage	470.2 MB	Skipped frames due to encoding lag	0 / 13899670 (0.0%)

Output

Stream	Status	Dropped Frames (Network)	Total Data Output	Bitrate
Recording	Inactive	0 / 0 (0.0%)	0.0 MB	0 kb/s
	Recording		568.0 GB	371 kb/s

Scenes

- Surveillance Network
- Surveillance Network 2

Sources

- Media Source
- Hitman 1.1 Pro #1

Audio Mixer

Scene Transitions

Controls

Start Streaming

Stop Recording

Start Virtual Camera

Studio Mode

Settings

Properties for 'Media Source'

☐ Local File

☒ Restart playback when source becomes active

Network Buffering 1 MB

Input

Input Format

Reconnect Delay 4 s

☐ Use hardware decoding when available

☒ Show nothing when playback ends

☒ Close file when inactive

YUV Color Range

☐ Apply alpha in linear space

☐ Seekable

FFmpeg Options

Defaults OK Cancel

General Appearance Stream Output Audio Video Hotkeys Accessibility Advanced

Output Mode

Streaming Recording Audio Replay Buffer

Type

Recording Settings

Recording Path Browse

☐ Generate File Name without Space

Recording Format

Video Encoder

Audio Encoder

Audio Track ☒ 1 ☒ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

Rescale Output 2560x1440

Custom Muxer Settings

Automatic File Splitting ☐ Split by Time

Split Time

Encoder Settings

Rate Control

CRF

Keyframe Interval (0=auto)

CPU Usage Preset (higher = less CPU)

Profile

Tune

x264 Options (separated by space)

OK Cancel Apply

Advanced Scene Switcher - 1.31.0

General Macro Title Executable Region Media File Random Time Idle Sequence Audio

Macros

Macro 1

Macro 2

Macro 3

Edit macro

Name: Macro 3 Run macro ☐ Run macro in parallel to other macros ☒ Perform actions only on condition change

Timer minutes has passed

Time remaining: 300 seconds

Pause Reset ☐ Save time remaining ☒ Automatically reset timer after duration was reached

Scene Item visibility Surveillance Network - Media Source

On Surveillance Network Hide Media Source

Wait 0.80 seconds

Wait for Fixed duration of 0.80 seconds

Scene Item visibility Surveillance Network - Media Source

On Surveillance Network Show Media Source

Cobian Reflector

Compression type

Method

Compress files individually

Zip

Encryption

☒ Encrypt the files

Passphrase

Passphrase (confirm)

Passphrase hint

Passphrase's strength

Compression level

No compression

Splitting (7zip only)

Split archive

Size (in bytes)

No splitting

524288000

Archive comment

OK

Cancel

Post-backup events

☒ Delete the source's content. Even with errors: Yes

+ Add

Edit

Delete

Arrange

☐ Do not execute if pre-backup events failed

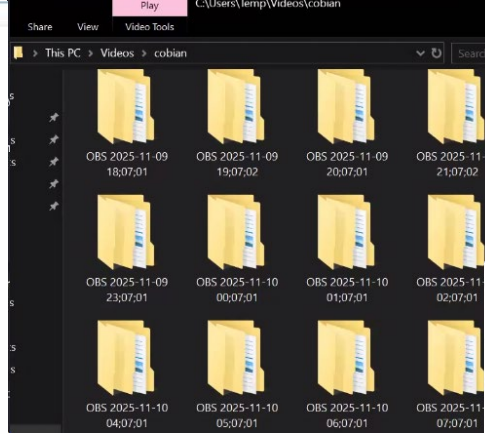
```
2025-11-10 10:07:01 Backing up the task "nvr vault"
2025-11-10 10:07:01 Applying the parameters to the task "nvr vault" (if any).
2025-11-10 10:07:01 Starting the copy. The user running the task is: SYSTEM
2025-11-10 10:07:01 The destination directory "C:\Users\Temp\Videos\cobian\OBS 2025-11-10 10:07:01" has been successfully created.
2025-11-10 10:07:01 Backing up the directory "C:\Users\Temp\Videos\OBS" to "C:\Users\Temp\Videos\cobian\OBS 2025-11-10 10:07:01"...
ERR 2025-11-10 10:13:21 An error occurred while compressing the file "C:\Users\Temp\Videos\OBS\2025-11-10 10-05-04.mkv" into the archive: (32) The proces
2025-11-10 10:13:21 The archive attribute for "C:\Users\Temp\Videos\OBS" has been removed.
2025-11-10 10:13:21 The file attributes have been copied from "C:\Users\Temp\Videos\OBS" to "C:\Users\Temp\Videos\cobian\OBS 2025-11-10 10:07:01".
2025-11-10 10:13:21 The timestamps have been copied from "C:\Users\Temp\Videos\OBS" to "C:\Users\Temp\Videos\cobian\OBS 2025-11-10 10:07:01".
2025-11-10 10:13:21 Checking if there are empty subdirectories...
2025-11-10 10:13:21 The directory "C:\Users\Temp\Videos\OBS" has been backed up.
2025-11-10 10:13:21 [DEBUG] A sub-backup item has been added to the database.
2025-11-10 10:13:21 [DEBUG] The actual path for the current sub-backup has been added to the database.
2025-11-10 10:13:21 [DEBUG] A backup item has been added to the database.
2025-11-10 10:13:21 Executing the post backup events...
2025-11-10 10:13:21 Deleting the source directory "C:\Users\Temp\Videos\OBS"...
ERR 2025-11-10 10:13:21 An error occurred while deleting the source file "C:\Users\Temp\Videos\OBS\2025-11-10 10-05-04.mkv": (32) The process cannot acce
2025-11-10 10:13:21 The content of the source directory "C:\Users\Temp\Videos\OBS" has been deleted.
2025-11-10 10:13:21 The post-backup events have been executed.

2025-11-10 10:13:21 ** Backup for the task "nvr vault" has ended **
2025-11-10 10:13:21 ** Processed files: 2. Backed up files: 2. Created folders: 0. Backup size: 4.15 GB. **
2025-11-10 10:13:21 ** Number of errors: 1. Time elapsed: 0 hours, 6 minutes, 20 seconds. **

2025-11-10 10:13:22 The backup has ended. There are errors. Consult the log file.

2025-11-10 10:13:22 [DEBUG] Getting the backup history for the task "10889e84-ea72-458e-a97b-563840ce9719"...
```

Property	Value
Task name	nvr vault
Task ID	10889e84-ea72-458e-a97b-563840ce9719
Source size	Not available
Files in source	Not available
Folders in source	Not available
Ignored files	Not available
Enabled task	Yes
Source	C:\Users\Temp\Videos\OBS
Destination	C:\Users\Temp\Videos\cobian
Group	(No group)
Backup type	Full backup
Include subdirectories	Yes
Create new separated backups	Yes
Use archive attributes	Yes
Use Volume Shadow Copies	No
Schedule type	Timer
Timer (minutes)	60
Compression type	Compress files individually
Compression method	Zip
Encrypt the files	Yes
Archive comment	
Number of filters	Inclusion: 0, Exclusion: 0
Number of events	Pre-backup events: 0, Post-backup events: 1
Mirror task (use with care!)	No
Use absolute paths	No
Always create top parent folder	Yes
Clear archive attribute (!)	Yes
Include backup type in the name	No
Ignore empty directories	Yes
Run the task as some other user	No



Zip

Uncompressed extensions

Zip64 extension

*.zip

If needed

*.rar

Unicode file names

*.7z

Encryption method

*.sqx

AES (128 bits)

*.arj

7Zip

Method

☐ Encrypt file names

LZMA

☐ Solid archives

☒ Use multithreading

User interface protection

☒ Protect the user interface

Password

Password (re-enter)

.....

.....

☐ Allow manual backups

☒ Clear the password cache

	Timestamp	Type	Separated	Files	Size
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	11/8/2025 9:07:01 AM	Full backup	Yes	2	4.57 GB
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	11/8/2025 10:07:01 AM	Full backup	Yes	2	4.59 GB
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	11/8/2025 11:07:01 AM	Full backup	Yes	2	4.58 GB
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	11/8/2025 12:07:01 PM	Full backup	Yes	2	4.59 GB
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	11/8/2025 1:07:01 PM	Full backup	Yes	2	4.59 GB
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	11/8/2025 2:07:01 PM	Full backup	Yes	2	4.57 GB

- Demo video omitted in public version

**View from
Phone**

View from Camera

- Demo video omitted in public version

The background is a solid teal color, densely populated with numerous speech bubbles of various colors including red, yellow, pink, grey, and purple. Each speech bubble contains a large, dark blue question mark. The bubbles are scattered across the entire frame, creating a pattern that suggests a multitude of questions or inquiries.

**ANY
QUESTIONS?**