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# AFJAGS Podcast: Episode 10

## Career Path with Brigadier General Mark Maldonado – Part 1

**HOST:** MAJOR RICK HANRAHAN, USAF

**GUEST:** BRIGADIER GENERAL MARK MALDONADO, USAF

This is part 1, of a two-part interview, with Brigadier General Mark Maldonado, the current Commander for the District of Columbia Air National Guard, who also holds the remarkable achievement of attaining 3 Air Force Specialty Codes (AFSCs) through his career as a pilot, personnelist, and a judge advocate.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

In this episode, we interview **Brigadier General Mark Maldonado**, the current Commander of the **District of Columbia Air National Guard** on career path and his unique story from humble beginnings to become a commanding general along with some of his leadership lessons. This episode is the first part of a two-part interview. In this first part, we discuss his background and unique achievement of attaining three Air Force specialties as a pilot, personnelist, and a judge advocate. Here are a few highlights from part one of today's show.

**GENERAL MARK MALDONADO:**

Being a JAG is an incredible responsibility, especially for some folks who've just you know come out of law school to have that kind of influence over folks, over their lives, disciplinary issues; but it really taught me a lot about hard work, doing the best you can at everything you do, and also about embracing opportunities.

**ANNOUNCER:**

Welcome to the Air Force Judge Advocate General's Reporter Podcast, where we interview leaders, innovators, and influencers on the law, leadership, and best practices of the day, and now to your host from the Air Force Judge Advocate General's School.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

Welcome to another episode from the Air Force Judge Advocate General's School at Maxwell Air Force Base. I'm your host, Major Rick Hanrahan. Remember if you like the show, please consider subscribing on [iTunes](#) and leaving a review. This helps us to grow in outreach to the JAG Corps and beyond.

Well, I am very excited for our show today. We have the unique privilege to interview Brigadier General Mark Maldonado, the current Commander for the District of Columbia Air National Guard, who also holds the remarkable achievement of attaining three Air Force specialty codes or AFSCs through his career as a pilot, personnelist, and a judge advocate. A true triple threat one could say, and he's here today to talk about his career path and that there is not necessarily a quote unquote *normal* career path. From his humble beginnings in Puerto Rico and then, the Bronx, New York where he first learned to speak English, to his prominent role as a commanding general. Sir, thank you for taking some time out of your hectic schedule to speak with us today.

**GENERAL MARK MALDONADO:**

Thank you so much. I'm happy to be here.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

Brigadier General Maldonado pinned on to the rank of Brigadier General this past June of 2019, and has had a truly remarkable and a unique career. He graduated with a Bachelor of Science from the U.S. Air Force Academy in 1991, and commissioned as a second lieutenant pilot in May of that year. He attended undergraduate pilot training at Vance Air Force Base, Oklahoma. From there, he transitioned into a personnelist, earning his second AFSC, where he acted as the chief of personnel utilization and training at McGuire Air Force Base in New Jersey.

Brigadier General Maldonado then moved back into his pilot career path as a KC-135 aircraft commander at both Grand Forks Air Force Base and then, the New Jersey Air

National Guard from 1994 until 2006. During his transition to the New Jersey Air National Guard, he entered law school and graduated with a J.D. [Juris Doctor law degree] from Rutgers Law School in 2004.

In 2006, he transitioned into his third AFSC as a deputy judge advocate with the 113th Wing District of Columbia Air National Guard. He subsequently became the State Staff Judge Advocate for Joint Force Headquarters of the D.C. National Guard. In his civilian capacity, he worked as a federal prosecutor for the [Department of Justice](#) for more than a decade, where he prosecuted large-scale international cases, working at the Counter-Terrorism, Narcotic, and Dangerous Drug sections.

Brigadier General Maldonado has numerous deployments under his belt, including flying 48 combat sorties over Afghanistan in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Other deployments include Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, Spain, Oman, and Portugal. He also represented the [Department of Defense Institute for International Legal Studies](#) as a rule of law counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics expert instructor in Peru, El Salvador, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Currently, Brigadier General Maldonado acts as the Commanding General of the District of Columbia Air National Guard and Director of Joint Staff. He is the principle advisor to the Commanding General of the D.C. National Guard and manages over 1,200 Airmen, civilians, and contractors, while ensuring all his units maintained the required readiness for worldwide deployment. Wow, sir, amazing amazing background there. Did I at least provide a fair summary?

**GENERAL MARK MALDONADO:**

You did, thank you so much. Seems like I can't keep a job though, huh?

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

I'm a bit out of breath, sir. Well, we could spend weeks on all the topics that you touched upon, sir, but for today's topic, we're going to hone in on your career path and any leadership lessons you'd like to provide. Your story starts from humble beginnings and showcases there is no quote, unquote *normal* career path. We'll also explore some of those transition or inflection points, where you move from one career field to another. With that, sir, perhaps you could provide a little more background on your current position as the Commander of the D.C. Air National Guard.

**GENERAL MARK MALDONADO (5:31):**

Sure, so, pretty interesting that as the Commander of the D.C. Air National Guard, we have a very unique base. So, I know a lot of your listeners are used to being active duty, maybe they don't know a lot about what the Air National Guard does, but our unit is about 60% full-time folks. And we have a very unique mission in that we're the primary unit in charge of protecting and defending the Capitol. So, we have 26 F-16s, 3 C-40s, which are 737s. With our F-16s, we have 24/7 alert. We've responded to over 6,600 events since 9/11. So, that means either launching; either being told that we're going to launch, and then, running to the aircraft and starting them up; and then trying to mitigate the issues in the air.

So, basically, anybody who sleeps within a large distance away from D.C., all those folks are protected by the D.C. Air National Guard. So, that's a heavy responsibility, and it's something that we take very seriously. We also fly 3 C-40s, and those airplanes fly around the world. And we deploy diplomatic air power throughout the world by taking heads of states, heads of agencies, congressman, senators throughout the world. So, very busy unit. It's pretty much almost like an active duty if you will, the way we operate.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

Yes, sir, clearly a very important mission. No doubt there. Now, you've mentioned to me, off air in a private

conversation, that you were originally from Puerto Rico, and then, you moved to the Bronx in New York where you first learned to speak English. Might you be willing to provide perhaps a little more background on your upbringing, transitioning to moving to the Big Apple of New York City, learning English, and eventually, how you became interested in a military career.

**GENERAL MARK MALDONADO (7:28):**

Sure, so, I was born in Manhattan, and then, shortly thereafter, my mother was about 18/17 years old when she had me. And shortly after I was born, I went to live in Puerto Rico with my grandparents, and so, I was there. Didn't speak any English there. Think I had some rudimentary English instruction while I was there, but literally, when I came back to live in the United States to live with my mother, I didn't learn to speak English until I was about 10 years old.

So, it took a while to do that, but yeah, it was humble beginnings. But I tell you, you know, the funny thing about the Air Force, when you get to know people is, is everybody has a story. Everybody that you talk to has something they had to overcome in their past in order to get to where they're here and that led to their success. So, it was a great, humbling experience growing up, but it really taught me a lot about hard work, about doing the best you can in everything you do, and also, about embracing opportunities.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

And how did you become interested in the military, sir?

**GENERAL MARK MALDONADO (8:30):**

My grandfather used to live in New York City, and so, he was a carpenter in Puerto Rico, but he was a patriot to the United States. And so, he always felt that we should give back. So he was one of those folks that just believed in what the United States stood for and always imposed on myself and my brother to serve. So, my brother ended up joining the Army at some point. He was enlisted in the Army for a bit, and then, for me, I decided to go to the Air Force Academy and then join the Air Force.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

So, if you could place yourself back in your shoes at that time, did you ever imagine that you would become a commanding general one day?

**GENERAL MARK MALDONADO (9:13):**

No, nah, not at all. I think my entire career, I only just looked at the job I had right in front of me at the time. I never really saw myself going anywhere other than just doing the best I could do in the job that I was in. So, no, it's very humbling experience.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

So, you went to the Air Force Academy, and after you graduated from the Air Force Academy, you completed pilot training at Vance Air Force Base.

**GENERAL MARK MALDONADO:**

Mm-hmm.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

And then, you transitioned into a personnelist's position at McGuire Air Force Base. Can I ask how and why did you move into this new AFSC?

**GENERAL MARK MALDONADO (9:50)**

When I was in pilot training at the time, there was a shortage of airplanes. So, we started off with 16 students in the beginning. Finished with 30 who graduated from pilot training. Out of those, two of us got airplanes right off the bat, and then, the rest of us had to wait. And so, the interesting thing at the time is, you know, so I was one of the folks who had to go to another job. But when I got put into personnel, I will tell you that it probably wasn't the happiest day in my life because I just saw it as like oh boy, I came into this to fly, to do this specific mission, and then, now, I'm moving somewhere else. But it's really interesting how sometimes fate and other facts, other matters come into your life, and they change things. And a lot for the better, just because that experience gave me a lot. I learned so much more about the Air Force than I would've otherwise.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

And, sir, could I ask what was it like transitioning from a pilot into a personnelist? For example, what were some of the biggest challenges that you faced?

**GENERAL MARK MALDONADO (11:00):**

The biggest challenges had to be the number of people that I had to command off the bat. So, for instance, you know, when you're pilot training, you're by yourself and an instructor, with some other students, and you're pretty much just taking care of yourself. When you transition to a job like a personnel job, I walked into managing about 77 folks. All with different ranks, different backgrounds, different roles that they had to play.

And then, on top of that, we learned all the different regulations, personnel regulations. And so it was a lot of information to take in. But also, it gave me a breadth of experience I wouldn't have had otherwise because I had to learn how the Air Force operated, not only from a technical standpoint of a pilot and how to fly an airplane and those regulations; but now, I had to look at policy from the broader range of how it impacted the entire Air Force, and the different regulations that you have to follow, and the reasoning behind those regulations. And you had to learn how to communicate more effectively with everyone around you, because you're managing so many different people from so many different backgrounds.

Most of the folks that were personnel at the time at the McGuire office were retrainees, so they worked at different jobs at the Air Force as well. So, I would say about half of those folks, they were brand new to personnel. So, I had to learn how to make sure we trained them all. Make sure that they followed procedures, making sure to hold people accountable, give feedback. So, it really opened my eyes to a broader Air Force than I would have otherwise.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

And sitting in your current position today and reflecting upon this experience you had as a personnelist, are there any key takeaways you had from this experience?

**GENERAL MARK MALDONADO (12:45):**

I don't think I'd be where I'm at today if I hadn't had that experience as a personnelist, and I think especially as a JAG too. So, I know we could talk some more about that if you want. But I will tell you that having the operational experience as a pilot, and then I think also even operationally, when you look at the personnel field, and the JAG field, I think all three of them have different facets of how to lead. How to manage people. Judgment, because in order to have good judgment, you also have to have a breadth of experience to pull from.

And having had the experience as a JAG, for instance as a JAG, you get to see everything. You know all the different disciplinary issues that are going on in the base. You understand how all the different squadrons work together. You have to do that in order to be effective at your job.

And then, as a personnelist, I also understood all the different regulations that our members have to follow and how to hold people accountable, and then, you also understood the power of the pen. In writing policies that folks can follow and understanding that your job is not just to get up in front of folks and give a motivational speech. It's also to take a look at it in a strategic way and understand that my actions have to pass the test of time, and also where am I leading this organization, and we need to have policies in place to do that.

So, since I've taken over this job, we've done a number of policies, and I've learned also from the JAG side that you don't want to just write policies that you know are a thousand pages long. Most of the things that I write will be about five pages, easy to read and understand. But because I have the background of impact that I would

have on the JAG side, personnel side, and the pilot side, I think it's helped me be more effective.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

Great insights there, sir. Thank you for sharing. So, your next transition back into your pilot career, right, as a KC-135 aircraft commander at Grand Forks Air Force Base in North Dakota. What were some of the challenges of getting back into your pilot's career field?

**GENERAL MARK MALDONADO (14:47):**

So, I was out of the airplane for about, from flying for about two and a half years. And it really wasn't too hard to get back in it to be honest.

I think if anything when I went to fly, you could see that there's a difference between myself and some of my colleagues who had not been out of the cockpit like I was—who didn't do something else, because automatically, I was put into the jobs like the executive officer position and also the standardization and evaluation section, and those were coveted positions to be in. But because I had the maturity of understanding regulations, understanding different parts of the Air Force, knowing how to converse with the enlisted members in a more effective way—those things kind of set me apart from others. So, I think my transition was actually pretty easy.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

And then, around the end of 2000, after approximately nine years of active duty service, you made another large, I would say large career move, and you left the active duty. Could I ask why you left active duty and what were your plans at that point?

**GENERAL MARK MALDONADO (15:54):**

I left primarily for family and then, also to pursue a different career path. Something I always wanted to do. So, when I was in the Bronx, and I had the Air Force Academy recruiter come by to talk to me. I asked, "Can

I go to law school from the Air Force Academy?", and his response was "Yes." Although, I think that really wasn't the answer, right?

I mean, it wasn't like a direct transition, but the interesting thing I was always interested in being a federal prosecutor, and then, hopefully, doing some good for the community. And some of the things I saw in the Bronx, and it was not uncommon to hear gunshots at night or you know the amount of violence I saw and the way I saw people being treated. I always wanted to find a way to make a difference and add to the positive story of that.

So, for me, when my commitment came up for pilot training, my initial commitment, which was nine years, I had two daughters at the time, and so, the decision was hey look, you know, to stay full-time doing this and being deployed 220 days a year—like I was during at that time—maybe it wasn't the best for the family, but I had this other yearning to go to law school. And so, I knew that the New Jersey National Guard had a program where they would pay for any school you went to, state school. So I could go to Rutgers for free. And so, I applied for law school. And I was able to go there for free, which was great.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

So, it sounds like the two main contributing factors was the desire from the get go, right, to become a federal prosecutor and also your family's influence.

**GENERAL MARK MALDONADO:**

Yes, very much so.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

And why the desire to become a federal prosecutor, sir?

**GENERAL MARK MALDONADO (17:43)**

Because I wanted to make a difference in the community. When I was growing up, I didn't see a lot of law enforcement activity in a positive way when I was growing up. And I just felt like it could be done a lot better. That a lot

of times when I saw crimes occurring, you know. I mean, I could go on to a lot of stories of how violent things were back then. But I just felt that something could be done to help the folks that were in the community in order for them to be able to thrive and to just live life without being worried about safety all the time, and those issues. And so, I just felt that, that would be a great way for me to contribute.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

So, during this time, your next transition into the New Jersey Air National Guard as a KC-135 pilot and commander, and then, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 occur and you deployed shortly thereafter and had the unique opportunity to fly, I think it was 48 combat sorties over Afghanistan.

**GENERAL MARK MALDONADO:**

Right.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

What can you provide to our listeners about that experience, and how had your training experience up to that point prepared you for such an important mission?

**GENERAL MARK MALDONADO (18:50):**

So, I was in my, I think I was in my first, second year of law school when that occurred, when 9/11 happened. And I still remember like it was yesterday, just gathering with a bunch of students looking at the TV screens and wondered what was going on. And shortly thereafter, my phone rang, and I was told to come in to the unit, and so, I went in there, and we're flying missions over New York and D.C. about a day or two after 9/11 since we were right there in New Jersey at McGuire Air Force Base. And then, by December of that year, we deployed to fly missions over Afghanistan, and that's where the 48 combat sorties came from.

I think, you know, I'll tell ya, it puts things in perspective. It's what that does. I remember when I was in law school, a bunch of folks were doing interviews for jobs and for internships, and they were upset that these things were

getting canceled because of what was going on with New York and the 9/11 attacks. I remember just thinking you know boy, there's a bigger mission out there, right? There's something more important than how much money you can make in a year and getting those kind of jobs. So, I think for me, serving has always been a big part of who I am, and serving a mission, serving something that's bigger than ourselves. And so, I think my experiences up to that point just led me to just dropping everything and just saying "Hey, you know, it's time to do this," and deploy and do what we're trained to do.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

And did that require a break in law school?

**GENERAL MARK MALDONADO (20:27):**

It did; it did. So, I graduated in January of 2004. I was supposed to graduate in May of 2003. So, literally, what I did is I went to school year round once I came back from that deployment, and I was able to just graduate six months later.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

And so, you graduated from Rutgers Law School in 2004, and you subsequently become a federal prosecutor. How did your military experiences thus far prepare you for your new civilian career?

**GENERAL MARK MALDONADO (21:00):**

The ability to handle stress. The ability to look at things from a bigger picture perspective. I remember I got some feedback after my interviews. So the job, so I came into the **Department of Justice under the Honors Program**. And that program had about 3,000 applicants, and they hired six people, and that was for the criminal division, which is where I interviewed. And I also interviewed for the Antitrust Division, and they gave me an offer from them as well. But for the Criminal Division, specifically, I got some feedback from my interview. And what they said to me, and I didn't think I did particularly well because I didn't get a lot of feedback when I was talking to the folks. They were just asking me questions, but one of the members of

the panel said to me later after I was hired. He said that was probably the best interview he's ever seen in his life. And he's been a prosecutor for over 20 years. And he just said "You were just so calm and collected, and so confident, and so in a way that just made people feel at ease." And so, he says you know, he said to me, "That your life experiences kind of led you to that," and so, that impressed them the fact that I was in the military. I knew what it was like to serve a mission, to serve something above myself. And then, to also, be able to put things in perspective and understand that you just have to take things one step at a time. And so, I think they felt that, and I got offered the job. So, that was good.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

So, it sounds like that was a double win, your military experience actually helped you prepare you for the job, but it sounds also like that the selection committee viewed your military experience with great value.

**GENERAL MARK MALDONADO (22:36):**

They did, they did. And I think what they valued the most is the sense of mission and a sense of having such varied experiences and succeeding in those areas. That, I think for them, it's easy to kind of foreshadow that you'll also be successful with this. And lot of being a prosecutor, it's also about judgment.

So, it's one thing you can learn the books, right? And so, you graduate law school, and they can see your GPA and see how smart you are with those things. But the other part that is hard to predict is, is this somebody that we can trust to have the power to charge individuals and incarcerate folks; and their judgment piece then comes in to all those military experiences, because the one thing about the military that sets almost every profession apart is that you get tested. You get tested to the core of who you are and how well you can handle stress. How well you can make a decision. How well you can take all the different pieces of information in front of you, assimilate them all, analyze it, and then, try and make the best decision possible. And I think being trusted with judgment is probably one of the key things you learn

in the military because you get tested so often. I think you just keep getting better at it.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

Absolutely, sir. So, now, you're a newly minted federal prosecutor. What were some of the duties you had to do in your new job?

**GENERAL MARK MALDONADO (24:07):**

Some of the duties I had, at one point I was put in charge of the entire Southeast United States, all the federal districts. So, there's 26 federal districts from Washington D.C. to Florida to Mississippi, and then, also the Caribbean. And so my—I was one in six people in the section that was selected to do that job—and so, my job was to keep up with any terrorism cases that came up, any charging decisions that were made by the U.S. Attorney's Offices in those districts. I was the first approval authority for any charges that were being filed, and so, the reviewer. So, I had to evaluate whether we should charge the way that we did or whether there's a different way of doing things.

Like for instance, we had one case in which a father was out with a laser pointer, messing around with his kids—didn't have the best judgment in pointing this laser pointer at some aircrafts. Ultimately, the decision from the attorney's office was to charge a terrorism charge, and then, my decision was "no" because we don't want to use terrorism charges in a way that goes out to parents, who you know may not be exercising their best judgment, but we want to really use this towards the actual terrorists. And so, we have to make sure that we can guard the terrorism charges, so we don't use them in a frivolous way that would take away the support from the public as we use those charges.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

It sounds also that you traveled extensively with this job, and what were some of the more significant challenges you had to overcome in that position?

**GENERAL MARK MALDONADO (25:41):**

Well, it was a 24/7 job, and so, you could imagine. So, I had access to secret, top secret systems traveling to three letter agencies weekly to meet with them to access threats against the United States, and how well, how best we could mitigate those threats, utilize the legal system. Sometimes that entailed charging folks with crimes that they committed but maybe lesser crimes than their actual ones, so we can maybe stop them from doing something or traveling to other countries in order to work with other agencies and other governments in order to help us with the terrorism.

And so, I would travel to places like to Paraguay, for instance. I was in Paraguay four times, and I helped write some of their legislations, some terrorism legislations that they put forward in the past. Nicaragua ended up passing some legislation that I ended up drafting and putting some you know editing to. So, we worked internationally in order to help the country as well as possible to protect the United States, and so, I traveled to so many different countries all over the world. I mean, I can't even recall all of them, but you know, I've been to as many countries as I think as I've traveled in the Air Force with the Department of Justice.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

Wow, and did the Department of Justice, sounds like the leveraged your Spanish speaking ability.

**GENERAL MARK MALDONADO (27:13):**

Yes, I was actually fortunate enough to be acting legal attaché in the U.S. Embassy in Bogota. Did that for a bit. From there I was working Attorney General of Colombia in extraditions. Working policies, helping out with current cases that we're working that had effects in the United States but originated in other country. Had a chance to interview what they call here (Spanish word) folks that were **FARC** who were trying to come back to civilian life. And so, we had to interview those individuals, so they could tell us the full effects of everything they did before they were allowed to come back.



And so, there were so many experiences that I've been able to have just from those jobs alone. I must've traveled about four or five months a year throughout the United States, but also abroad. And then, I also would conduct counter-terrorism training, rule of law training to folks in different countries. And we worked with them to help understand how the United States laws worked, because whenever you request information to either like mutual legal assistance treaty from another country, right? Or letters rogatory. It was important for those other countries to understand how our system worked. So that as we try and exchange information, we try to find a dual criminality for offenses, or to meet each other's requirements in order to exchange information. It was important for those countries to understand how we work, because a lot of the times when we told the country "no", we're not going to give you that information or we're not going to give you that individual, they would think we just weren't, you know, we didn't want to help them. But in reality, it was more because they weren't meeting the requirements of how to right that. So, I would teach other countries how to do that as well.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

Absolutely incredible experiences there, sir, which I think is kind of a good segue into this next question. In September of 2006, you became the Deputy Staff Judge Advocate for the 113th wing for the D.C. Air National Guard, which now, this is your third AFSC within the Air Force. How does your military and your federal prosecutorial experiences prepare you in your new role here as a deputy staff judge advocate?

**GENERAL MARK MALDONADO (29:27):**

I think it all fused together for me. I ended up leaving flying at that time because as a federal prosecutor the demands were so great, and so, what's interesting about my career so far if you've seen a pattern is, I didn't really plan it at all. I just did the best I could with the job that I had, and then, I tried to make it all work, right?

So, I ended up switching over to the JAG corps. At that point in time, thinking you know my career is probably either going to be what it is. Honestly, I didn't think that way. I just thought I'll just do this. This will work out better. I could utilize all my skillsets together. So, it all blended in really well.

I think having the experience at that time from being a federal prosecutor, I understood already how to try and be the best judge advocate I could be. And by that, I mean just working with people, understanding the effects of the job and the grand effects that it has, right? And so, how seriously you have to take it because being a JAG, it's an incredible responsibility, especially for some folks who've just you know come out of law school to have that kind of influence over folks, over their lives, disciplinary issues, being principle counselors to commanders on issues that effect thousands of people. I think all those different experiences helped me to do all that.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

It's clear your career path has kind of vectored different directions, and you probably heard the adage that no one serves alone. How could you characterize your family support through all these different career transitions.

**GENERAL MARK MALDONADO (31:18):**

Yeah, no, I mean, you can't do it alone. You're right about that. I think family, it's, could be extended out to military family, right? I think you need strong mentorship. I will tell you, on my family side, I was the first to go to college, and no one in my family had been to law school or had a job that I guess you could say is more of a, you know on that scale of schooling that you need to have in order to do it. And so, you know, my grandfather was a carpenter. He's an amazing, amazing man, but the interesting thing is you know, there was no advice to be had on the family side as to what to do, how to do it, what I do at law school, or what job should I take, or anything like that.

The best advice they would give me is more anecdotal to you know have integrity. Do the best job you can, and treat other people with respect. And those are the kind of advice that I received from the family side, and probably the best advice, right? Because most of us look for hey, how do I get the next job, or how do I make more money? You know, how do I do this? But for them, it was just a matter of being a good person.

On the military side, I received help throughout my career. There's always been great folks who kind of help you along as you go. And you know, I've made some really great friends throughout. So, I've got some great JAG friends who I keep in touch with, and if I'm flying to where they are, we get together, and talk about the good old days. But no, I definitely don't do this alone. And that's part of what you have to build, and as you go through, during the military, you build your network of people. Network of people that you can trust, that you can talk to honestly about. Gets to know you. Not the superficial kind.

You don't, you know, a lot of people try and get mentors for the sake of like I want to get this job, but I gotta get to know this person. That has never worked for me, partly just because I'm just not built that way, where I can just go see somebody just for the sake of a job. I care more about what kind of person they are. You know, they're the kind of person that does things the right way in the sense that they do the best they can at what they do. Not so much that they're successful all the time, but that they really put an effort to care about the mission and care about the people around them, and then, just to carry themselves with integrity.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

That concludes part one of the interview with Brigadier General Maldonado. In part two, we dive into his perspective on mentorship, the Air Force, tips for selecting a career path, and thoughts on the JAG profession at large, including a conviction that more JAGS should take command. Thank you for listening to another episode from the Air Force Judge Advocate General's School. We'll see you on the next episode.

**ANNOUNCER:**

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