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Master Sergeant Hardin

# AFJAGS Podcast: Episode 30

## Decorated Combat Paralegal with MSgt Austin Hardin

**HOST:** MAJOR RICK HANRAHAN, USAF

**GUEST:** MASTER SERGEANT AUSTIN HARDIN, USAF

We sit down with Master Sergeant Austin Hardin, an active duty Air Force paralegal, to discuss his 2013 combat experience in Afghanistan which earned him a Purple Heart and Bronze Star for his heroic actions in an insurgent convoy attack.

### **MAJOR RICK HANRAHAN:**

In this interview, we sit down with Master Sergeant Austin Hardin, an active-duty Air Force paralegal to discuss his 2013 combat experience in Afghanistan that earned him a [Purple Heart](#) and [Bronze Star](#) for his heroic actions in an insurgent convoy attack where he was initially rendered unconscious by a vehicle-borne IED, recovered, immediately began returning fire, and saved the lives of other passengers and drove them to safety. Here are a few clips from the interview.

[Upbeat Intro Music].

### **SHOW EXCERPTS, MASTER SERGEANT AUSTIN HARDIN:**

Somebody called out that it was the water truck on the right and the next thing I remember, there was a blast and I wake-up to gunfire.

My first instinct which is coming from the training was to get my M4 out and start returning the fire so that we could get everybody else into our vehicles so that we could get out of there.

That convoy happened and everything changed.

### **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 Apple Podcast, Spotify, or your favorite podcast platform and leaving a review. This helps us to grow in outreach to the JAG Corps and beyond.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

Today, we have an amazing and courageous story in store for you from our very own Master Sergeant Austin Hardin, a paralegal supervisor and instructor here at The JAG School. And he's graciously agreed to speak with us on a 2013 combat experience in Afghanistan that earned him a Purple Heart, Bronze Star, and the admiration of many for his heroic actions in an insurgent convoy attack where he was initially rendered unconscious by a vehicle-borne IED, recovered, immediately began returning fire, and put his life at risk where he saved the lives of other passengers, but I'll let him to discuss those details. Master Sergeant Hardin, thank you for coming to speak with us today.

**MSGT HARDIN:**

Thank you, Major Hanrahan, and it's definitely my pleasure.

**GUEST INTRODUCTION**

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**MAJ HANRAHAN:**

Master Sergeant Hardin is originally from Indianapolis, Indiana. He entered the Air Force in 2005 in the security forces career field where he worked as a patrolman, trainer, confinement officer, and NCOIC, or noncommissioned officer in charge, of police services and gate section within his security forces squadron. His tenure in security forces included one deployment to Balad Airbase, Iraq, where he worked as a response force member investigator.

Then, in 2011, Master Sergeant Hardin transitioned to the paralegal career field with assignments to Kirtland Air Force Base, New Mexico, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, and here at The JAG School, at Maxwell Air Force Base. He's worked as the NCOIC in multiple positions, with an emphasis on military justice in general law.

In 2013, he volunteered for a second deployment, this time to Camp Phoenix, Afghanistan, where he worked with the Defense Contract Management Agency or DCMA, which turned into conducting convoy operations for all auditors traveling around the country. This is the deployment that we'll plan to be talking about today. Currently, he acts as the instructor supervisor of the paralegal development division here at The JAG School.

So, Master Sergeant Hardin before we discuss your incredible deployment experience, would you mind providing a bit more background on what you do in your current assignment here, at The JAG School?

**MSGT HARDIN:**

Thank you, Major Hanrahan. Again, I want to emphasize that I am extremely happy to be on this podcast and humbled that you would ask. What I do here, as the instructor supervisor, as the paralegal development division is I oversee all of the teaching hours and the academic instruction that our instructors give to both the paralegal apprentice course and the paralegal craftsman course.

**MAJ HANRAHAN:**

So, thanks for that. Master Sergeant Hardin, you know, you started your career in security forces, and then transitioned into the paralegal career field. Now, I would say there's obviously some—there's an overlap between law enforcement and the law, but I'm just curious as to why you made that switch.

**MSGT HARDIN:**

I was sitting in Iraq and I was going through as an investigator and we had a lot of different sexual assault cases that I was investigating, and I worked with the legal office there at Balad quite a bit, and I knew that I was gonna either get out of the military or retrain. I wasn't getting a lot of opportunities with law enforcement back in Indiana while I was deployed; they wanted me to come in for an interview which I obviously could not do when I was in Iraq. So, I pushed the retrain button

because I was really interested on what happened on the other end after I investigated the sexual assault and it went to legal, and that's the reason I decided that I wanted to go the legal route.

## **PODCAST INTERVIEW**

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### **MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

Well, as discussed in previous episodes, there is no normal career path, right? There's many ways that one can go through a career. So, I'm just fascinated to hear on how you went about that. So, kind of moving in to today's discussion, could you provide a little more background for our listeners on where you were working before your second deployment in 2013, and how you got involved in that deployment?

### **MSGT AUSTIN HARDIN:**

So, I was at Kirtland Air Force Base, New Mexico, and I was working in the military justice section. I had—wasn't an NCOIC yet because I hadn't been to seven level, and I was working with one of my good friends and we were talking about deployments and this deployment popped up for the Wing and I asked if I could volunteer for it, and that's really where it went. I didn't really know what Defense Contract Management Agency was or what they were doing or where I would fit in, but it was at the end of my enlistment. I was, again, thinking about getting out of the military and wanted to have more experiences in life, so I volunteered for it.

### **MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

So, after you volunteered, what type of training did you do in preparation for the deployment?

### **MSGT AUSTIN HARDIN:**

For this deployment, I did the two-week deployment training at McGuire Air Force Base, and then I also ended up doing a month-long training with the Army, also at McGuire, and then went to the escape-evasion capture training in San Antonio, which was by far the best training I've ever been to; it was only a couple of days, but it was the best.

### **MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

And now, kind of thinking back upon going through that deployment, did the training help prepare you for the deployment and did your previous career field in security forces and previous deployment also help train you for the second deployment?

### **MSGT AUSTIN HARDIN:**

Absolutely. The training that I got at McGuire was extremely instrumental in how I reacted; my previous convoy experience as a security forces member was instrumental, but understanding how to move through a convoy and what each position is responsible for really helped save all of the team members. That's why, in my opinion, that's why all of us are still alive.

## **DEPLOYMENT**

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### **MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

So, let's move into this 2013 deployment, maybe you can walk our listeners through kind of the general nature of what the mission was once you got there and you start to understand what you were going to be doing in Afghanistan.

### **MSGT AUSTIN HARDIN:**

So, I originally was out at Bagram working with Defense Contract Management Agency and that's the hub that all of DCMA comes through when they go to their different FOBs. And the OIC, the officer in charge, for the convoy team came through and realized that I had a security forces convoy background, and one of the individuals coming in to be on the convoy team didn't. So, they made the switch and that individual stayed at Bagram and I ended up moving on to Camp Phoenix to be in charge of their convoy team.

### **MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

So, was it your understanding when you left for the second deployment you were going to be doing more or less paralegal duties, and then you got in theater, and that's when things changed?

**MSGT AUSTIN HARDIN:**

That's correct. Yeah. All of a sudden, things changed and that's where we were at.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

I'm sure that was a bit of an eye-opening experience?

**MSGT AUSTIN HARDIN:**

I was a little bit excited, to be honest. I—sitting behind a desk and doing all that stuff can get a little boring, especially in a deployed location. So, I was excited for the opportunity to go and see more of Afghanistan and Bagram Air Base.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

So, you leave Bagram and now you have this kind of new mission that you've been detailed to because of your previous experience, that was the reason they chose you, is that correct?

**MSGT AUSTIN HARDIN:**

Yeah. That's correct. So, we get to Camp Phoenix and meet the whole team; we start going through the different routes that we take and really just going to the different FOBs and getting to know what those missions were for DCMA and their auditors.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

And if you could, for our listeners, whatever you're able to discuss, what was the general makeup of this team that you were assigned to?

**MSGT AUSTIN HARDIN:**

The team, the OIC, was a contract's lieutenant. Luckily, he was a prior Army Combat Medic, so that helped out a little bit. We also had a Gunnery Sergeant, and myself, and two aircraft mechanics. That was our convoy team.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

And what was the general mission that you were going to be detailed to do with this team?

**MSGT AUSTIN HARDIN:**

Our mission was to drive DCMA employees around to the different FOBs so that they could audit either fuel, or if they were building a new dining facility, or ammo, things like that.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

And what was the tempo of the mission?

**MSGT AUSTIN HARDIN:**

We would go out, out of Camp Phoenix three or four times a day to different FOBs, and that was six days a week.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

So, you were averaging a certain number of convoys per week, I would assume?

**MSGT AUSTIN HARDIN:**

I would say probably about 20 a week.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

So, prior to the event that you're here to talk about today, which I believe was October 18, 2013. How many convoys had you conducted up to that point?

**MSGT AUSTIN HARDIN:**

Up to that point, I believe it was close to 90, and that was—that specific convoy was our fifth of the day.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

So, maybe you could, at this point, walk our listeners through that, that particular event from the beginning, kind of through the account, and kind of what you recall, how it all transpired.

## **THE ATTACK**

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**MSGT AUSTIN HARDIN:**

Earlier that morning, we had dropped off a couple of fuel subject matter experts at the Kabul International Airport. Then we had gone and done a couple other convoys throughout the day. And that specific one, we had to

go back and pick up the fuel SME's. So, we're leaving the gate, and you always have that feeling like there's something not right. So, I was extra, extra vigilant during that entire route. We get to the gate at the international airport and it's really slow, so my anxieties up a little bit already and that increased it. So, we get in the gate, we go to pick up our SME's and there's two of them. So, one gets in the first vehicle and the second one gets in the second vehicle, that I'm driving. And we make our way out, and we usually go out a different gate than what we come in, but this time we went out the same gate that we came in, which is extremely unusual, but it's what happened.

So, we leave that gate and we're going down, it's a really bumpy road, and I happened to look over and there's this little kid, he's got a fake gun and he's pointing at it and pointing at us and shooting. And I remember his dad just smacked him so hard, and I laughed because that was, it was kind of funny. And then we see a fuel truck or a water truck that was sitting off on the side the road and some of the intel we had suggested that it could be an IED. So, we were paying more attention to that truck. And then somebody called out that it was the water truck on the right, and the next thing I remember there's a blast and I wake up to gunfire. There was a nest behind us with an automatic weapon that was firing at us from behind. And then there was a vehicle that was in front of us that was on fire, and they were shooting at us from the front as well.

Once I woke up and returned the fire my vehicle was disabled. So, I was trying to get it in drive at the same time firing back at the individual in front, firing at us, and calling out to the first vehicle because they were on fire, and trying to get out. So once I got the vehicle in drive, there was a large caliber round that hit the back of the vehicle, went through the first layer of ballistic glass and hit the second one and jerked our vehicle forward, and actually put it into drive.

So, we ended up being able to pull forward and block the fire, the rounds coming from the left side of vehicle, we are able to block those so that the people in the first vehicle could get out and get into ours so that we could evacuate.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

So, there was two vehicles in the convoy you were in?

**MSGT AUSTIN HARDIN:**

Correct there were two; both of whom were up-armored Ford Excursions. The first one is the one that took the most of the impact; it lifted ours off the ground and moved us facing a concrete wall. So once we got them out and we evacuated, we got all of the way back to Camp Phoenix, was probably about a mile and a half away, got back to Camp Phoenix and pulled through the gate; I drove straight to medical.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

How many persons were in this convoy?

**MSGT AUSTIN HARDIN:**

We had six total, including myself; three in the first vehicle and three in the second.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

And so, you said that there was an IED that exploded and it took out the first vehicle pretty substantially, also knocked your vehicle over, did the explosion essentially render everyone unconscious at that point?

**MSGT AUSTIN HARDIN:**

From what we were told, was a 500-pound bomb in the back of a Toyota Corolla. So, as far as I know it rendered everybody unconscious, I know that it did me.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

And from what you can tell, you were the first to kind of regain consciousness and you started to fire back at the insurgents where the fire was coming from, and then also in conjunction with that work to secure those passengers that you were taking back from the airport back to Camp Phoenix?

**MSGT AUSTIN HARDIN:**

Correct. As soon as I woke up there was already incoming fire. So, my first instinct, which is coming from the training was to get my M4 out and start returning the fire so that we could get everybody else into our vehicle so we could get out of there.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

And you mentioned earlier how the training, especially in Texas, was some of the best training that you had, how did the training prepare you for that moment?

**MSGT AUSTIN HARDIN:**

You always sit in training and you don't want to pay attention because you don't think that it's going to happen, and I definitely didn't think that I was going to have to evade anything or escape anything. But during that timeframe all I could think about was if I don't get this vehicle up and moving then we're going to have to get out of here on foot. You never know what's going to happen when you're out there on foot. So, a lot of things are going through my head at that point, but luckily one of the, one of the insurgent's rounds kind of helped us out. So, that was an experience.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

Would you say that this experience was maybe one of the most intense ones you've had in your career, including your experiences within security forces?

**MSGT AUSTIN HARDIN:**

Without a doubt. That experience was the most, both terrifying and exciting at the same time, if that's possible to make sense of. It was scary, but it was exhilarating.

## **RECOVERY**

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**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

Were you aware at that time on whether you sustained any injuries at all?

**MSGT AUSTIN HARDIN:**

No, not at that time. I didn't feel anything. Once we got back to Camp Phoenix is when we were all able to relax a little bit more and we started checking each other to see if there were any gunshot wounds or any shrapnel or any of that in us. And at that point, there wasn't. And luckily it was just that we had all been rendered unconscious. None of us had any other wounds besides that.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

And who were the other military members that were with you on that particular convoy?

**MSGT AUSTIN HARDIN:**

We had the convoy team, minus our OIC, he was back doing paperwork; and then we had our two fuel SME's, one master sergeant, and one tech sergeant.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

So, you're able to miraculously get this car to work again, get all the passengers in the vehicle, get back to Camp Phoenix and assess the situation and whatever medical was needed at that time. Is that accurate?

**MSGT AUSTIN HARDIN:**

Yeah. That's accurate. And at that point in the evening, we had left the first vehicle out there because it was on fire. So, we were trying to get medical to evaluate us as well as the special forces that were going to go out and get our vehicle back. They were trying to get a bunch of intel at the same time. So, five of us were somewhat cleared by medical at that point; one ended up being medevaced out to Bagram that same night. Once we reassessed the next morning, we did all of our statements that we needed to do for DCMA and I had just—I hadn't been able to sleep for a couple days at that point and I was getting really bad headaches, and

I ended up going to Bagram with a couple of the other guys just for a quick medical clearance. And then, they decided I was gonna stay in their brain injury clinic for a couple days.

So, I stayed at Bagram for a couple of days and then I wasn't getting any better. And they also realized that during the convoy I had tensed up so much that I had a couple of hernias. So, I had to go to Landstuhl and get surgery on hernias, and they decided that they—everybody coming into Landstuhl does a brain injury test, and I failed that. So, I had—not only was I getting surgery at Landstuhl, I had to stay in their brain injury clinic. So, I was at Landstuhl for a good month and a half after that.

And then, the surgery was good, the surgery went well. And then, I had to try to test out of the brain injury clinic and that didn't go well. So, at this point, I'm thinking well, man, I need to pass some sort of test, but I couldn't tie my boots. So, that was a reason why I kept failing. So, then they sent me back to the states to Brooke Army Medical Center, where I stayed there for about a month rehabbing, doing a bunch of brain exercises and all that, and they realized that I was getting a little bit better so they sent me back to Kirtland and back to work I went.

## **BACK TO "NORMAL LIFE"**

### **MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

Wow. Incredible. So, I have to ask, I mean, the transition back to the "office life" or "normal life" as a paralegal, I mean, after such an intense experience, combat experience, what was that experience like for you?

### **MSGT AUSTIN HARDIN:**

That was a really difficult experience, you know, there are a lot of things that, you know, I look back on and I think well, I could've done that differently, or the reason this happened was because of something else. Going back from that to an office setting was extremely difficult because it was a lot slower. Once I got back, I took my R&R and I took some more leave, and you know, just try

to kinda get back to normal a little bit. And then I got back to the office and I'll be honest, it was really boring, and none of the people that were in the office when I left were there. Everybody had PCS'd, so it was all new people. So, I didn't have anybody to really—I didn't feel comfortable with anybody yet and I was kind of thrown back into it.

And, like I said, there things that I could've done differently, you know, and I think going from that convoy experience to an office experience, I was looking for more, so I took on more work, becoming the NCOIC of justice and gen law at the same time. Looking back on that, I probably shouldn't have done that because it was too much mental stress, where I was trying to get back to where I was in the deployment, trying to feel like I was doing something instead of, you know, just reviewing paperwork.

So, I pushed a little too hard and I think that's where I get a lot of my resentment, looking back on it after seven years, come Sunday. So, I don't want to constantly blame certain individuals or any of that and not take any blame for that, you know, I think we tend to do that instead of looking inward on ourselves and say, "Yeah, I could've done this differently."

### **MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

Were you in contact with any of those members of your convoy, did you reach out to them within, I don't know, six months to a year after the incident, or do you still stay in contact with them?

### **MSGT AUSTIN HARDIN:**

There were a couple that I tried to reach out to right after because some of them were still there, they didn't get medevaced out. So, I tried to keep in contact with some of them there. There's one individual that I still maintain contact with, which is funny, when he got in my vehicle, I was like oh no, I don't want this guy my vehicle. But he—turns out, you know, we hit it off and he and I are the only two that stay in contact.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

And I would think that would be helpful as far as having somebody that you can relate to with this experience.

**MSGT AUSTIN HARDIN:**

Right. And I think that's one of the most difficult things in this career field is, I don't really have that person to relate to; there are a couple of attorneys that have been through this and, you know, some of them I talk to occasionally, but there's not really somebody that understands what it's like. So that's the difficult piece for me. So, I reach out to different veteran organizations and talk through things with them.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

Sergeant Hardin, as you probably know, you know, many people, after situations like this, they separate or they medically retire, but in your situation, you chose to remain in the Air Force and continue to serve to this day. So just curious as to why you've made that decision.

**MSGT AUSTIN HARDIN:**

Before the—that specific convoy, I had actually had separation orders. I was going to get out; had the orders in hand. I was working with the Air Force to get them to move everything back to my home station, and that convoy happened and everything changed.

It wasn't about me at that point because the reason I was gonna get out was me, I was going to do that, that's what I wanted to do. And that convoy happened and made me realize that it was more about the future, which is why I wanted to come here, to The JAG School and teach, was because that was—it was, in my head, it was my chance to change the future and the thinking of what paralegals do; they're not just secretaries, they're not just coffee makers or copy machines; they are paralegals. And just because you're a paralegal doesn't mean that you're not going to do something off-the-wall when you deploy or something that you don't think is gonna happen. So, I wanted to be able to give back to the career field, that was why I stayed in and why I continue to stay in.

## **LEADERSHIP**

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**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

Well, that is very inspiring to hear that, and we're glad you did. So, I think that's been a great thing for all the JAG Corps and the Air Force at large. So, Master Sergeant Hardin, as you probably know, this show focuses on leadership, law, and innovation. In my opinion, your story exemplifies leadership innovation in a very unique way. I would just be curious to hear what you, in your opinion, think makes a quality leader.

**MSGT AUSTIN HARDIN:**

When I think about it, and everybody wants to consider themselves as a great leader, and of course I do too, and I've had a difficult time trying to wrap my head around what is a good leader. If we all think that we're good leaders and there are things that don't go to plan, then are we?

So, I'm trying to sit back and wrap my head around what I think is. And one is knowing when to push and when to lay back. When to ask the question of, "Hey, you're a little off, what's going on?" Instead of, "You're a little off, fix it." Stepping outside of your lane sometimes when it's needed.

And I'll tell you that one of your past guests, General Harding, was very instrumental in getting me back home. He had conversations with my ex-wife and I remembered going through the different places from Camp Phoenix all the way back to Brookes and people saying, "Oh yeah, you're the paralegal, we know about you, your general needs to stay in his own lane."

And I remember hearing that and thinking, does he?

He's the leader pushing to get his person out of a situation that he doesn't feel they need to be in, trying to help get them better instead of just pushing them to the side and saying, well that happened, that's a will.



So, knowing when to push, knowing when to lay off, asking the question of what's wrong instead of assuming that there isn't anything wrong and that's just you, really just understanding people. And this might be an unwelcomed opinion, but I am a "people first, mission second" person, because if you don't have the people, they're not there to do the mission.

And family time, having the ability to give your people family time because at the end of the day, when you're done with the Air Force, it continues. But your family's there, they're the ones that are there every day for you. So, giving them the ability to be with their family is huge.

## **INNOVATION**

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### **MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

Well, those are some great words to reflect upon I think, for everybody. Clearly, also in this experience you had, I would say that you had to innovate on a moment's notice, right, when your convoy was hit? And more recently, our current Chief of Staff of the Air Force General Brown, has called upon all Airmen to change and innovate, or he says we will lose in future combat missions. Could you offer any insights or guidance on how our Airmen and/or others can work to innovate better, whether in a legal office environment, whether they're in security forces squadron, on the flight line, or elsewhere?

### **MSGT AUSTIN HARDIN:**

I think when it comes to the innovation piece, in a legal office is knowledge. If we don't know every new thing that comes our way, whether it's a court opinion or a new process, then we can't change. We can't be innovative. We can't make it better if we don't understand how it currently is. And I think that's a big downfall, is sometimes we get overwhelmed with the amount of work and don't really look at what the process is. "Well, this has always been the process, so we're going to keep doing it this way because it works." Well, there's obviously a new process because the other one didn't work, so we need to understand that new process so that we can make future processes better.

## **RESOURCES**

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### **MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

Great insights there. So, we've touched upon a lot of things here on this discussion today, but just curious if you have any recommendation on resources, whether books, videos, podcasts on what we've talked about or just on leadership in general.

### **MSGT AUSTIN HARDIN:**

There are a lot of different resources as far as leadership. I know that you can read the [Chief of Staff's](#) reading list. You can go on to our TJAG's resources list and read some of those. [Mental health](#) has an amazing amount of resources. And I know that that's something that people are afraid of, is even walking into mental health to get a resource because you might be labeled, but those locations have so many different ways to give you leadership styles, or to help you understand an individual who might be struggling with something.

## **FINAL THOUGHTS**

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### **MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

And also want to just leave you the last word and any final tips or parting words on today's discussion that you would like to impart on our listeners.

### **MSGT AUSTIN HARDIN:**

Yeah, there's one, and I just talked about it recently or previously about mental health and the stigma that some people think is out there, and it's something that I believe we should all talk about. Which is why I talk about it so openly because you never know who needs to hear somebody in a leadership position say that they seek mental health treatment. I've recently had a couple students who said because I talked about it, they were able to go and seek help that they wouldn't have, had they not seen somebody in a leadership position do that. You know, I've also been open to the fact that I did go to an alcohol treatment facility because I wasn't coping the way that I should have after the deployment, and that that's not the end-all to a career either.

So, there are a lot of different resources out there that people just need to see somebody in a leadership position push or they're not going to do it.

**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

Master Sergeant Hardin, thank you so much for those insights and for coming on here and sharing your story with us. We really appreciate the authenticity of it, and I thank you again for coming on today.

**MSGT AUSTIN HARDIN:**

Thank you, sir. Again, it was my pleasure.

**TAKEAWAYS**

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**MAJ RICK HANRAHAN:**

That concludes our interview of Master Sergeant Hardin. Here are my top three takeaways. **NUMBER ONE: JAG Corps members are dual professionals, both in the profession of law and profession of arms.** We talk a lot about the profession of law and that's well and good, because it's what military legal professionals do on a daily basis, but the other profession, the profession of arms is just as important. To me, Master Sergeant Hardin's story is a reminder of JAG Corps member's call to the profession of arms. It showcases that military judge advocates and paralegals maintain a very unique calling to both uphold the law and bear arms when called upon. There is no civilian legal counterpart to this dual natured calling.

Master Sergeant Hardin was called to deploy as a paralegal. He went to deployment training like so many JAG Corps members do, with no real expectation that he would ever need to "use the combat training". He arrived at Bagram to do standard paralegal work and within short order was tasked to lead convoys for contractors through Afghanistan. He was averaging somewhere around 20 convoys per week. This tasking was definitely something outside the norm for a paralegal, but with his background as a security forces member and training he was able to successfully carry out this duty. Then, on October 18, 2013, his convoy was hit by a 500-pound roadside bomb which rendered his entire

team unconscious, set the first vehicle ablaze while insurgents fired upon the team. Once Master Sergeant Hardin regained consciousness, he mentioned how his training immediately kicked in and he was able to save the lives of his entire team.

So, the next time you ponder what it means to be a dual professional, both within the profession of law and arms, think about Master Sergeant Hardin's story, and many other legal professionals who have stepped up when called upon in their profession of arms.

**NUMBER TWO: leaders must learn when to push and when to hold back.**

Master Sergeant Hardin mentioned how the convoy experience shaped him and the struggles he faced when trying to assimilate back into office life. He immediately took on more work in an attempt to, as he states, "feel like he was really contributing". But reflecting on this, he realizes now it was too much. He pushed too hard and should have given himself more time to assimilate after the convoy experience.

Master Sergeant Hardin says that leaders should know when to push and when to hold back. We can all reflect upon this leadership principle, both for ourselves and our team members. Yes, there are times we must surge and put the mission above all else, but there are also times when we should pause and hold back when needed to ensure people are taken care of. So, take some time to reflect on when to push and when to hold back, both for yourself and your team members.

**AND NUMBER THREE: Master Sergeant Hardin's story is a reminder of our JAG Corps rich heritage.**

On the first floor of the Air Force JAG school building at Maxwell Air Force Base, in the hallway adjacent to the first-floor break room, about 50 feet down, there is a small room with a wooden door, and the words "JAG traditions" that hang above it. This is the Air Force JAG Corps' heritage room, dating back to the birth of the Air Force and its JAG Corps.



Air Force JAG Corps' heritage room (photo by Thomasa Huffstutler)

Before entering this room, there hangs two black plaques etched in silver commemorating our JAG Corps brothers and sisters that have paid the ultimate price for their country or earned one of the highest distinctions of military service.

The right plaque states, "We remember", and lists 56 names with 46 officers and 10 enlisted who have lost their lives while on service to their country, dating from 1954 to 2014.

The left plaque states, "The Purple Heart", and lists 20 names with 16 officers and 4 enlisted from 1945 to 2015 who received the Purple Heart having been wounded or killed while in service of their country. Our guest today, Master Sergeant Alston Hardin has his name etched here. He is one of a few enlisted members in over 70 years that earned the Purple Heart within the JAG Corps for his valiant and heroic efforts on that convoy attack.

These plaques showcase some of the heroic men and women within our rich JAG Corps history, and hang as a reminder to the call to arms that we all bear as members of the Armed Forces, no matter our duty title. Master Sergeant Hardin's story is one of many who rose to the challenge when called upon in service to our country. The next time you're at The JAG School, consider taking a walk by the heritage room to see the great lineage that have within our ranks.

That concludes my top three take a ways. Thank you for listening to another episode. If you like this episode, please let us know by leaving a review on Apple Podcast, Spotify, or your favorite podcast platform and consider subscribing to the show. We'll see you on the next episode.

[Upbeat Music].

#### **ANNOUNCER:**

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#### **DISCLAIMER:**

Nothing from this show or any others should be construed as legal advice. Please consult an attorney for any legal issue. Nothing from this show is endorsed by the Federal Government, Air Force, or any of its components. All content and opinions are those of our guests and host. Thank you.

#### **GLOSSARY**

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- **AFJAGS:** Air Force Judge Advocate General's School
- **DCMA:** Defense Contract Management Agency
- **FOB:** forward operating base
- **IED:** improvised explosive device
- **JAG:** judge advocate general
- **NCOIC:** noncommissioned officer in charge
- **OIC:** officer in charge
- **PCS:** permanent change of station
- **R&R:** rest and recuperation
- **SME:** subject matter expert
- **TJAG:** The Judge Advocate General