Col Sheri Jones

Mr. Dan O'Connor

AFJAGS Podcast: Episode 37

Digital Transformation with Colonel Sheri Jones and Mr. Dan O'Connor

HOST: MAJOR RICK HANRAHAN
GUESTS: COLONEL SHERI JONES AND MR. DAN O'CONNOR

In today's interview, we speak with Colonel Sheri Jones and Mr. Dan O'Connor on the digital transformation occurring within the Air Force JAG Corps.

MAJOR RICK HANRAHAN:
In this interview speak with Colonel Sheri Jones and Mr. Dan O'Connor on the digital transformation occurring within the Air Force JAG Corps. We discussed why and how digital transformation is underway, offer some historical context, then moving into discussion on applications, the design process, migration to the cloud, and even touch upon how this digital transformation impacts the culture of the Corps as a whole. Here are a few clips from today's show.

[Intro Music]

SHOW EXCERPTS, MR. DAN O'CONNOR:
IT and how it affects the JAG Corps mission is really a team effort.

COLONEL SHERI JONES:
A lot of folks just say, "I don't have time to learn something new. I don't need change. I just need to be able to get my work done." And that's not something that should be ignored—and we aren't.

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 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 an Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or your favorite podcast platform and leave a review. This helps us to grow in outreach to the JAG Corps and beyond.

Well, we have a great topic in store for today, and one that is directly on point to the technological innovation occurring within the Air Force JAG Corps. We're going to discuss the digital transformation that is underway with two leaders in this space, including the Director and Deputy Director of the Air Force JAG Corps Legal Information Services Directorate, Colonel Sheri Jones and Mr. Dan O'Connor.

Colonel Jones and Mr. O'Connor, thank you for coming on the show today to speak with us.

COL JONES:
Absolutely. Thank you so much for having us.

GUEST INTRODUCTIONS

MAJ HANRAHAN:
Colonel Jones is the director and Chief Information Officer for the Air Force JAG Corps Legal Information Services Directorate, located at Maxwell Air Force Base. In this capacity, she's responsible for providing responsive and secure legal specific information technology solutions to the Air Force and DoD legal communities.

She has held a number of positions through her Air Force JAG Corps career, to include working at the base legal office, as a professor at the Air Force Academy, Deputy Staff Judge Advocate, Chief of Officer Assignments for the Air Force JAG Corps, as the Staff Judge Advocate at the 30th Space Wing at Vandenberg Air Force Base, California, and prior to her current position as the Deputy Commandant of The Air Force JAG School, where I had the opportunity to work with Colonel Jones for about a half a year or so until she moved into her current position.

And our second guest, Mr. Dan O'Connor, is the Deputy Director with Colonel Jones at the Legal Information Services Directorate. He oversees implementation of the Air Force JAG Corps information technology architecture, including its case management, knowledge management, learning management and VTC platforms. He also directs the joint DoD Computer Aided Legal Research capability.

Mr. O'Connor began his career as a project engineer at VSA engineering in Michigan, where he designed automotive modeling software for Ford Motor Company. After attending and graduating law school, he practiced corporate law for a law firm in Detroit before eventually transitioning into the Air Force.

So, before we dive into our topic today, could you both provide a little more background on your current positions and what you do?

COL JONES:
Absolutely. This is Colonel Jones. So, our positions at JAS are support positions for the entire JAG Corps, the folks in the field doing their work. We work directly for The Judge Advocate General, which helps us affect the strategy for where IT can support all of our domains and the legal offices that do the work.

In that capacity, we work directly with our MAJCOMs, we work directly with The JAG School, over there with Major Hanrahan, to ensure that we're doing what the field needs us to do, which is give them the tools necessary to close the gap between the time it takes for them to find answers and deliver them to the decision-makers, which are our commanders. So, the commanders can make decisions based on the reliable, efficient data that their legal teams give them.

So, it's my job to sort of bridge the gap between information technology and the JAG Corps.

MAJ HANRAHAN:
Thank you, ma'am. And Mr. O'Connor, could you also offer a little more background on your current position?

MR. O'CONNOR:
Sure. As Colonel Jones mentioned, we provide tools to the JAG Corps to help them better perform their mission. Specifically, my job is twofold; one, to kind of guide the strategy of our IT organization, whether it be setting up good platforms, working in the cloud, or setting up applications, or working on how we deal with the field. So, to kind of chart a path forward from our current technology to future technologies and kind of matching that with what big Air Force and big DoD IT wants us to do.

Additionally, kind of work on implementation and operations, kind of everyday stuff to make sure that our systems are always up and running, that our applications are providing what they're needed to provide, and that they're kind of continually developing, that we're listening to the field and kind of constantly making changes that match with what the field needs.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

MAJ HANRAHAN:
Well, thank you, both, for that. I am excited to talk about today's topic, definitely, especially getting into the applications and cloud and design and all these other things that we kind of talked about in prep for this interview. But before we kind of dive into that, could one of you field just the broad general question on what does it mean when we say "digital transformation"?

COL JONES:
What it really means, as we're talking specifically about the JAG Corps' IT legal systems, is modernization.

So, it's digging into the infrastructure of our applications, putting it on a new platform, in this case, a cloud-based platform, which allows us to deliver efficiencies to the field, and in updated interfaces, more robust features

and capabilities across all of our 64 plus applications. And then, they'll be able to talk to each other.

Maybe there is a need in the field to understand how what's happening in our civil law domain directly feeds off of or supports what's happening in the military justice and discipline domain. Having all of these applications on this cloud-based platform will allow those systems to integrate and talk to us which then again, gives our legal offices access to data to be then able to deliver good courses of action to our commanders.

Dan, what would you add to that?

MR. O'CONNOR:
I mean, definitely digitalization is bringing new capabilities to the field, and that could have all types of formats; better able to upload documents and store documents, so we're not constantly using paper copies and just tracking that they exist in the Internet; it can be, maybe someday down the road, moving to mobile capabilities; better tracking, allowing the computer tool to do more stuff by itself and into the digital realm as opposed to handling everything on paper, on simple spreadsheets, on chalkboards, on whiteboards, etc., so that we can have it work more efficiently.

I always think the digitalization is moving to better technology that brings more capabilities to us, so that we don't have to do a lot of that ourselves.

MAJ HANRAHAN:
And Mr. O'Connor, if you could, could you also just maybe provide a little bit of historical context to where we came from and how this all kind of ties into the bigger Air Force?

MR. O'CONNOR:
Sure, sir. And let me kind of go way back to when JAS started, I think we were in Denver, and we would get search requests, sometimes via e-mail, sometimes via regular mail—we'd do a digital search ourselves and then

print everything out and then mail the documents back to everyone. So, that was the olden days, and then as the Web came out, we had better ability to create systems applications: AMJAMS was created, AFCIMS, and Roster; and so, as time moved on, more technology came out, the appetite for technology grew tremendously. As people became more familiar with it, got it at home, they wanted more and more.

And sometime that was simple, sometimes it was spreadsheets, but then eventually, it made to advance case management systems, knowledge management, and what the school uses, learning management. So, that's kind of the history as we go, we went from just having no applications to having five for about a decade, and then suddenly had this huge growth to 10, 20, 30, and even, I think, we have about 60 applications now, from AMJAMS, AFCIMS, WebLIONS, across the board.

And so, it has really exploded, and I think our part of the challenge of our job is to make sure we're getting the latest technology out there as it comes out, and is allowed by the Air Force, but also to keep control and make it manageable within our finite resources, to keep it up and running.

MAJ HANRAHAN:
And is some of the impetus behind this digital transformation that we're going through here, in the 2021 and beyond to—you mentioned 60 applications, that seems to be a lot of applications, is some of the impetus to streamline that, maybe reduce some of those applications, or make it so that they speak and look similar?

MR. O'CONNOR:
Sure. I think one of the keys to kind of handling that many applications is trying to do some consolidation. So, those things that are redundant, or those that have similar capabilities, try to group those together, as opposed to keeping them all separate.

Also, having a standardized user interface. Even companies like Microsoft, whether you hate or like their products, as you go through Word, Excel, PowerPoint, etc., they all had that same ribbon up top, and they all have the same user interface. So, if you've used one, you generally have a good feel how the rest work.

So, I think that's something that JAS hasn't done, because all our apps were created at different times by different people. So, I think that's our goal, is the digital transformation, to create that standardization across, consolidate to fewer apps, and then make those capabilities seamless throughout all our applications.

MAJ HANRAHAN:
Yes, sir that makes a lot of sense. And so, for Colonel Jones, what are we kind of doing? Maybe we can kind of now start to dive into some of the specifics. What are we doing to transform how we do business in this new digital age within the JAG Corps?

COL JONES:
Yeah, absolutely. So, we're on the cusp of real transformation right now. We have entered the contract with a contractor who's helping us build this brand-new platform. So, we are making our maiden voyage to the cloud.

You know, before you build all the fanciness on your three-story house, you've got to have a super solid foundation. So, that means cleaning out all the dust, all the clutter, and reorganizing everything. By everything, I mean data, to make it clean and streamlined and building the foundation through the databases, so we can have the integration through all the applications.

So, the hard lifting and the hard work has begun. In fiscal year 2021, we'll be primed to deliver on one of our flagship applications, which is the Disciplinary Case Management System [DCMS], which will be a case management system in the field for our folks to move

discipline from the end time of investigation all the way through adjudication, regardless of what that might be. So, the first delivery of that is this year.

So, we're not only just focused on that, but some of the other applications are coming along at the same time, because we have our own team of developers working along with Appian, who is the owner of the platform which we're building on. So, we're working side-by-side with the developers. So, our JAS developers are trained up at the same time.

So, we have—we're not only at the doorstep of real digital transformation, the door is open and we're inside, and we're building the transformation now.

DESIGN PROCESS

MAJ HANRAHAN:
How does this design process work between, you know, everyone with your team and the software company?

COL JONES:
Dan, why don't you take that one?

MR. O'CONNOR:
Sure. So, to be honest with you, it starts with requirements, knowing what the field needs. And in some sense, we can do that, and we'll talk AMJAMS and DCMS, specifically, some that is looking at what AMJAMS does currently, what it does well, where it lacks, and what key capabilities we need.

And then, we kind of talk, well, what, in a perfect world, what are the capabilities we want and what type of format, processing, and screen outlays, all that stuff. Then, we sit down with the vendor and we kind of walk through a lot of that; we'd sign out the data elements, what data is needed, what data needs to come in, what data needs to be processed, and potentially what data needs to go out in reports, where people need to see infographics?

So, a lot of that happens, and then what they do, is they do something called "storyboarding", which is part of kind of an agile process. And agile just means kind of taking two years to just have a huge amount of time to just get them all done. "Agile" means we start working through some of those requirements, developing some screens, and we show them to the user, or we show them to the POC in charge, and they give us updates—"Well, I said I wanted this, but now that I see it, I need to have a little bit more like this, that's where it's best used".

So, as we go through that agile interim process, we have, we kind of constantly do slight course corrections to make sure in a year, when we get done, it's exactly what the customer wants to use and needs, as opposed to just dumping something on them at the end of the year that they've never seen before, and we never allowed them to have any input except at the very beginning.

So, that's kind of how that agile process works, and most of the time, we do that internal to JAS. But, in this case, it's been such a big thing, and it's a new platform of technology that we haven't used before, so we are having the vendor do a lot of that development for us, kind of with us, I would say, so they can bring their expertise right from the get-go, as opposed to us having to learn on the job. So, that's kind of, we work back and forth, they show us, you know, each, every two weeks what they're doing. And we show that out to JAJM, out to field users, and get their feedback and we continually course correct. So, at the end, we have what we call, the "MVP", which is a "minimum viable product", which pretty much means it's exactly what we need to run, but with not all the little, little extra things we may add on down the road, but it's going to be available out to the field with a lot of new capabilities because the technology is new.

FEEDBACK

MAJ HANRAHAN:
And once you kind of get this out to the field, I'm assuming there's a way that the field can also provide feedback?

MR. O'CONNOR:

Yes. And I think the goal of any type of good application and AMJAMS and its follow-on, DCMS, is that you need continuous user feedback in development, like any other product out there in the world. If it never gets developed any farther after the day it's released, it's going to quickly become stale; processes are going to change, needs are going to change, leadership's directions are going to change, data elements are going to change. I mean, up to 10 years ago, certain things like maybe sexual assault, all the data that's required for that wasn't known about or was even thought about. And so, it was just in the last five to ten years where those types of data points absolutely needed to be tracked.

So, if you aren't continuously updating your technology applications, they're going to quickly become stale and out-of-date, and then people start having spreadsheets off to the side, and it becomes less and less useful.

THE CLOUD

MAJ HANRAHAN:

I know how Colonel Jones earlier mentioned that we're moving to a cloud-based platform, and I'll just kind of open this question to both of you, whoever wants to take this. Maybe we could start first, just for listeners, so we're all on the same page, if you could help define, what exactly is the cloud?

MR. O'CONNOR:

Sir, I can take that. So, let me kind of contrast that with currently. So, all of JAS applications are now hosted, they're in the web, but they're hosted on-premise at Maxwell Air Force Base. We have a server room that's on the second floor of The JAG School, and it hosts all of those applications, and it hosts just JA applications.

The cloud is kind of a communal hosting, whether it be some of the big providers like Amazon cloud or Microsoft Azure Cloud, it's a big place where we can host our stuff that takes advantages of all of the huge economies of scale that an Amazon or Azure would have. They have all the security built-in; they have thousands and thousands of servers. So, instead of us buying specifically what we think we might need, and then having to buy more every time we grow, or if we shrink, then we have to kind of just throw stuff away—an Amazon or Azure or any other big cloud outfit, they can kind of just output servers to you.

So, "Hey I need these 10 servers to do this application", "oh okay, we'll just allot you 10 of ours".

It's a very simple process that allows us to take advantage of a big company's technology that we couldn't afford ourselves and we couldn't develop ourselves. Kind of borrowing a big factory, or piece of a big factory, instead of having to have to buy a whole factory for ourselves. And so, that's where the Air Force and DoD has required everyone to go, to get away from our own little on-premise servers and move towards the cloud, government approved cloud, but cloud nonetheless.

And I think there's some big advantages to being on the cloud. For example, we get to use their technology without all the effort or all the cost on our end. It also could potentially have a lot better transmission speed. Instead of being locked on bases that have a lot of overuse and small bandwidth, Amazon and Microsoft Azure and those places have huge amounts of bandwidth because they do it at a huge commercial level. So, we'll be taking advantage of that.

Also, it allows us to have some flexibility. Not only to, as I mentioned, add servers or delete servers just by clicking a button on a window screen, but also, they have a lot of built-in services up there. Classic example is JAS currently has a search engine software that we use for KM and for knowledge management and other applications, but we had to buy that ourselves and we had to install it ourselves. But Amazon and other cloud providers had those services already built in. So, you just click if that's something you want, and you pay that extra fee, but it's shared amongst everyone that's using it. So, that gives you access to a lot of better technology at a lower price point, and quite efficiently too. So, that's

what's attracted DoD and Air Force to it, and I think that'll be beneficial to us.

COL JONES:
So, why does that matter to the JAG Corps? What that means is, then JAS can spend more time working specifically on making the applications that our lawyers and paralegals use to make their lives more efficient and help them close the gap between the amount of time it helps them to develop answers to questions and collect data and give it to their commanders. So, instead of us having to do the work that the cloud can provide for us, because they can do it better, quite frankly, they can focus on all the infrastructure stuff, which frees us up to be more responsive to the field, of their needs that they have.

You know, when Dan was talking about the advantages of the cloud, I was thinking about what's an analogy? I think about a home gym versus a big commercial gym. So, when you put together your little home gym, you're able to afford and upkeep maybe a couple different things that you need. But if you have a membership to a giant commercial gym, you have access to so many more types of workout equipment—free weights, a yoga room, an aerobics room, maybe even a spa. All those things that you would never have, if you just tried to do it on your own. So, that might be one way to think about what the cloud is. It's a very nice commercial gym versus your little home gym.

MAJ HANRAHAN:
Well, ma'am, I really like that analogy. I think that makes a lot of sense, and obviously I think pretty much industry across the board, whether it's the private sector or public sector, seems to all be going to the cloud, there's so many benefits. But what might be some of the potential disadvantages or risks with the cloud? I mean, I know one of the things, obviously, within the IT world within the government is we're always concerned about security. So, just curious to see what your thoughts may be on that.

MR. O'CONNOR:
Sure. I can cover that. So, hitting security first; the security requirements that DoD and Air Force requires are pretty much the same. Whether you're on-premise at Maxwell Air Force Base or whether you're at Azure cloud or not, the same requirements exist. There's the same procedures in place, you need same approval via A6 and SAF/AA, and all the approval authorities need to concur.

So, from a standpoint of the security that needs to be in place, that will be the same security. And so, I think there's less of a concern about that. I think for JA, it's a matter of how can we meet those very stringent security requirements that DoD and Air Force put in place, whether we do it in the cloud or whether we do it on-premise, the requirement is pretty much identical because the same security needs to be there regardless of where you're at.

MAJ HANRAHAN:
And so, is the trajectory of this kind of taking us to where it's going to look and feel more like the private industry?

MR. O'CONNOR:
The good and the bad of the cloud is, the good is that, as I mentioned earlier, there's a lot more capabilities, maybe better bandwidth. The downside is, you got to get all your stuff there. So right now, it's all crammed on servers that we know and trust and love, but are going away, and so now we're going a little bit into the unknown.

So, there's going to be some growing pains. It's a little bit more of a challenge. It's new to us and so that's why we're bringing in some contractors to kind of assist us with that. But no matter what, I think it's a growth that, one, has to occur; and two, is going to benefit us in the long run, but it's a little bit of a challenge to get past it.

And as you mentioned earlier, commercial world has already made this jump. Pretty much every company that has applications out there in the web, they are on

one of the clouds, and there's a couple of exceptions, but the majority of them are all in one of the top 10 clouds that are available, because it just doesn't make economic sense, or functionality sense anymore to kind of host all your own stuff. It's better just to ship it off to someplace that does it professionally for better. You know, no different than if you go to a doctor's office and go to a professional doctor as opposed to trying to learn medicine at your own house and do it all on your own dime. So, it makes sense to go to those people that do it every day for hundreds of thousands of different customers.

APPLICATIONS

MAJ HANRAHAN:
Yeap. It makes a lot of sense. So, kind of transitioning, maybe we could talk just briefly on the highlights of some of what of these new applications are.

COL JONES:
Well, I think what we're going to see for the applications are performing the same work that our current applications are doing. So, you're still going to have applications that help process military justice, of course; there will be those applications that will still help our international operations law folks; work air accident boards; and work legal assistance. So, we see the same application only with more enhanced features, more ability to collect data, documents share, and maybe pull some information that can be auto populated, like for example, from our personnel center.

So, now, I don't see new applications coming on, especially right now, as we're trying to transform what we have, do it slowly, methodically, thoughtfully. If we go too hard, too fast, without ensuring that the infrastructure is strong, it's just going to be like a house of cards and fall on top of itself, which is not where we need to be.

So, the newness will come in the look and feel when you click onto FLITE, which is sort of the homeroom of your class before you start specializing and looking

into special stuff inside FLITE, like Roster, which will get a facelift too. It will all get a facelift, but it will be systematic.

MR. O'CONNOR:
And to add onto that, I think, Colonel Jones brings up the good point that we can't, you know, can't forever continue to add more applications. There's no way JA or JAS could sustain hundreds of applications. And the work is not, you know, there's not thousands of new elements of work being added to JAGs. I think the goal is to take our known missions, with the known tools we have, and make them better; make them more efficient, make them more helpful, allow us to add documents, maybe e-signature down the road, maybe mobile down the road; streamlined the UIs so you can get to things faster, and it's less of a just a data entry and reporting machine. Instead, it helps you manage your work; keeps track of your military justice taskers, puts them on a schedule. There's all kinds of advanced capabilities that can come down the road as we put in these new technologies, as opposed to just adding more and more applications, which kind of limit the resources we can spend on any one application.

MAJ HANRAHAN:
Yes sir, and Colonel Jones, I think great points by both. And I know that a lot of people may be thinking when they hear "digital transformation", they go, "Oh, here we go", you know, "another application that I have to learn, another uphill battle", so to speak. And that could be something that's challenging from an enterprise-wide kind of viewpoint, because it's a change, right? Every time there's change, there's some growing pains to that. What is your team doing or what is the greater Air Force JAG Corps doing to help prep the Corps in accepting this new transformation and ultimately embracing it?

COL JONES:
That is such a great question, and one that's kicked off to the side. It's a concept and a concern that is baked in to the actual stages of the design of this for the reasons that you so smartly highlighted. Because folks do get

apprehensive when they see applications over the years come and go, or there's some big ramp up for some great new thing and then it doesn't happen for one reason or the other. And you know, that sits in our minds of, "Oh great, here we go again."

And when you talk about "messing with" one of the flagship applications, which is AMJAMS, which the Disciplinary Case Management System is going to replace, a lot of folks just say "I don't have time to learn something new. Just leave me alone. I finally figured out AMJAMS and now you want to change it? I don't need change. I just need to be able to get my work done."

And that's not something that should be ignored, and we aren't. And I just refuse to let IT happen to people. There's nothing worse than clicking on some application that you know you've used so many different times, you click onto it and it opens up and the screen doesn't look like anything you remember. And what crosses your mind is, "Oh, great. Man, I was going to do this in about 30 seconds, now it's going to take me 10 minutes to even figure out what's going on." So, that rests heavily on me.

So, we're doing a few different things and have a whole team dedicated right now to working **with** the field. When I say "field", I mean people in all the domains, across our full-spectrum of legal services, across our MAJCOMs and into the field, and we have a full committee of JAGs and paralegals who are helping us build DCMS. I don't mean they're in there building code. I mean they are looking at the demos that pop-up every two weeks, on those sprints that Dan was talking about, those little tiny chunks of work; evaluating them, and said "We really need for it to do this; we need it to do this." They are helping us build our training manuals. These people will then be the folks that go out and help us train everybody on how to use the applications. These folks are working inside their MAJCOMs, talking up and down their chain, showing them the demos, talking to their teammates about, "what do you want to see?" And I'm just so thrilled to say how involved those folks are.

In fact, something came up that we weren't expecting, just a couple weeks ago from that team. That is creating, we are going to take a look at that. In fact, we are going to jump back right now and see if we can't build in, because they're the ones working the program. And if it's not responsive to what they need, they won't use it and they'll come up with another way to do it. They'll go back to pencil and paper on the side or have a spreadsheet on the side. There's no sense in building a tool that isn't a result of what the field say they need.

So, that's helping with the whole real cultural change, too. We're embedding folks in the field right now who are working on the real implementation, and then we will need these folks to be our influencers as we move forward and get people to change. But it has to be all up and down the chain of command. You've got to get the senior leaders excited about it. If not, to get the folks in the field willing to use it, and that's were hoping to accomplish with the advisory committee.

Then, you've got to reach those folks somewhere up the middle, you know, who may be living with 12 years of, "Oh, here we go again", like you mentioned. "Here we go again. Let's just wait and see this DCMS thing actually materializes before I get too excited about it. Then we'll wait for it to, you know, blowup and break down." That's how we feel about IT.

Dan and I are both real sensitive to that, and we tried to talk a lot wherever we can about this in all different forums that we can. And more importantly, show people, right, because we could talk all day long, and they're like, "Well, that's awesome. Of course, Mr. O'Connor and Colonel Jones are going to get excited about this, but show me."

So, that's why we try to "show me" with the sprints all the time, so folks can say, "Hey, it actually looks like they're doing something and that really doesn't look too bad."

So, the first time, the last thing we want is the first time they try to go into some program, it's just not knocking them out between the eyes, because like, what is this thing, where's my AMJAMs, it's gone, where did it go? If folks are having that experience, then I will personally take that as a failure, because this culture change piece of this is just so critical. You can build the coolest thing in the world, but if people aren't willing to touch it, it's just a waste of time and money. Let's not forget the money.

RESOURCES

MAJ HANRAHAN:
Well, ma'am, thank you for that open and candid answer. I'm sure that's something that a lot of folks may be thinking about. And I can just personally attest, being at The JAG School and having the opportunity to work with your team, and seeing kind of what you do on a day-to-day basis, doing a lot of great things there, and your team has helped out the school. More recently, with our IT support in a very real and meaningful way. So, I think it's safe to say to the field to rest assured, that this is going to be coming out, and it should add a lot of value to what you do in your day-to-day job. Kind of transitioning to some of our final questions, are there any additional resources where our listeners, whether members within the legal community or elsewhere, could learn more about today's topic on digital transformation?

COL JONES:
Well, we do have our Knowledge Management site, that's internal to JAG Corps users, where we have a page dedicated to the Disciplinary Case Management System, folks to take a look at it and offer opinions. Just because you're not an advisory counsel, we still want to know what you think. And we do have some bullet background papers on digital transformation, in the eyes of what that means to the JAG Corps. I'm sure if you, for folks who may not be in the JAG Corps, there is a massive push DoD wide, then of course down to Air Force wide for digital transformation across the entire enterprise. It's a trendy, hot issue right now, and there are impressive studies and papers from Air Force Chief Information Officers and at

the DoD level as well that talks about the transformation DoD wide and Air Force wide.

MR. O'CONNOR:
Also, on specific things, if someone out in the field who's work the mission every day has some questions, or wants to be more involved, or give some input on any of our applications; every application has a project manager at JAS, and they keep track of the good and the bad; and when it's time for that particular application to make the digital transformation, to make the migration to the cloud, and to the new platform, they'll be the one in charge of it.

So, reaching out to the JA POC for that application area. And then also reaching out to JAS and talking to that project manager, giving input, or even just asking how things are going, or what the timeline is, is always a good thing. So, I think we're always interested in input. Obviously, certain inputs, timely, at certain times. We have a schedule where we're going to be migrating certain applications at certain times. So, getting a lot of input well prior to that, it may not always be timely, but we'll record it, and then when it's time for that application to make that transition, we'll make sure we utilize that input to kind of make better decisions. And then we'll be reaching out again, at the time of migration, regardless. So, there's always an opportunity to give input, to have a discussion with the project manager, and make things better with input from the field.

FINAL THOUGHTS

MAJ HANRAHAN:
Great. Thank you. And I'll kind of leave the last question for both of you, are there any final thoughts or takeaways that you'd like to leave with our listeners, whether on an area that we discussed through this interview so far today, or just anything maybe we didn't have a chance to discuss?

MR. O'CONNOR:
Sure. I'll start, and then I'll let Colonel Jones finish up. I think that IT and how it affects the JAG Corps mission

is really a team effort. What I don't believe, and I know Colonel Jones doesn't believe, that we just throw IT over the fence and then good luck users and they have to use it. I think the best IT and the best tool that has a positive impact on the mission is one where we kind of team together. We get good input from the field. We show them what we're doing. They give us feedback. We make changes, and in the end, it's a good product that they can use. And then, it continues to evolve over time.

I think that's super important in the JAG Corps and military it's more difficult, because we constantly have people moving in and out of positions. So, there's always a struggle. What one person may dislike something, but they're not there for 20 or 30 years, and so, they're not able to work with us over a long period of time; and a new person comes in, who may have different ideas. So, it's sometimes tough or more difficult for us to consistent user feedback. And that's just a challenge we'll have to work with. But I think what it makes more important is that as a user out in the field, if you have issues, if you see a good direction, to let us know, and give us feedback when we are able to ask for it, and when new things come out. I think that's super important.

It is important though, to recognize that we work in the DoD and some things are not possible, or some things are restricted, or some things are going come with the delay. There's no doubt that the commercial private sector is going to be ahead of us in many areas. Sometimes it's IT convenience. You know, I think at a private sector or company I was using my phone for business long before the government was. And in fact, I was handed an old-style blackberry when I initially took this job. So only recently have moved to an iPhone, something that's much more usable. But even that, most of our applications have no iPhone compatibility because it's not allowed. We only recently got certification that the CAC card could be used in respect to the iPhone.

So, there are some natural limitations, and it's for good reasons, for security, for accountability. The government doesn't have quite the flexibility that the big IT companies do, and the business companies do in the private sector, and that's just the limitation we deal with. But I think our goal is to give the user the best we can within those limitations.

Ma'am?

COL JONES:
I'm glad you brought that up, Dan. I was thinking about that too, because as we're talking about digital transformation, you think, "Well, when I'm on my phone or computer at home, that all looks pretty easy, everyone else's been doing it for a really, really long time, and there's JAS celebrating their breakthrough to digital transformation."

So, I can hear that when we're talking about it, and it is, as Dan mentioned, it is such a balance between protecting data, or PII and beyond is an incredibly—well it's the primary consideration when the Air Force and the Department of Defense considers what kind of software can be stuck into the Air Force Net. And the hoops that companies have to jump through to prove their level of security is monumental. And sometimes, it just simply does not fit into their business model to redevelop, rebuild, commit the resources—be it bodies or be it money—to satisfy the security requirements of just the Air Force or just the Department of Defense, to be able to do business with the Department of Defense. So, therefore some of the cool little features that we get easily at home and get easily on our phone aren't available to us, and that's why, because of the security considerations.

MAJ HANRAHAN:
Well, thank you, Colonel Jones and Mr. O'Connor, so much for coming on today to speak with us. Obviously, we just touched the surface on this topic, right, there are so many other things we could have got into on this, this discussion. So, for listeners out there, if you have more questions, you can always reach out to Colonel Jones and her team to learn more, or go online yourself to learn more. But that'll take us to the end for today.

Thank you, again for coming on, Colonel Jones and Mr. O'Connor.

MR. O'CONNOR:
Thank you.

COL JONES:
Thank you, so much for the so discussion, it was fun. Thanks so much.

TAKEAWAYS

MAJ HANRAHAN:
That includes our interview with Colonel Sheri Jones and Mr. Dan O'Connor. Here are three of my takeaways from the interview.

NUMBER ONE, **digital transformation is fully underway**, as discussed by Colonel Jones and Mr. O'Connor digitalization can be defined as moving to better technology that brings more capabilities to the field. In short, it **should** make our jobs easier, quicker, safer, and more reliable. It involves digging into infrastructure and applications, creating a universal user interface with more robust features that allows our current 60 plus applications to speak with each other. It also includes the ability to upload, store, and exchange documents quicker, safer, and more accurately. It even sets up the Air Force JAG Corps for the ability to integrate, with mobile capabilities, e-signatures, and other digital updates. And ultimately, digital transformation aligns with the National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy, and Air Force JAG Corps Flight Plan that calls for the JAG Corps to deliver legal results at the speed of relevance, as a force enabler for commanders to our mission sets.

NUMBER TWO, **the cloud-based world is here to stay.** As discussed in the interview, we historically as an Air Force and JAG Corps, hosted our own internal servers. But with that comes a great amount of upkeep and resources that doesn't make sense anymore in 2021 and beyond. The vast majority of the commercial sector

has been using one of the top 10 commercial cloud-based systems for quite some time with great success.

The Air Force evaluated the cloud-based systems and found them to meet our growing IT needs, along with ensuring the necessary security measures are in place. As mentioned by Colonel Jones and Mr. O'Connor, there are numerous advantages to a cloud-based system, including using private enterprise cloud-based technology with limited cost and effort to the Air Force, top grade industrywide internal security, increased transition speed with greater bandwidth, flexibility to grow and to add or even delete servers as needed, built in services such as search engines that can be as simple as a few clicks to implement, and backup redundancy only available through such a system.

Additionally, one of the main implications of these benefits is that Colonel Jones and her team can devote their time and attention to building and improving the actual applications, rather than building out an internal cloud system and or infrastructure. In short, JAS can be more responsive to the field and its needs, which in turn benefits commanders and the mission.

AND NUMBER THREE, **IT is a team effort.** This was a theme that permeated through the interview. Colonel Jones and Mr. O'Connor showed their sensitivity to the user experience. They discussed the design process and how they brought on field users to provide feedback from the onset and through the iterative design process. But as discussed, it's not just good enough to build the applications, interfaces, and systems. True IT innovation requires regular input from the field, including the good, bad, and everything in between.

IT is a relationship between the designers and users to meet the mission needs. In fiscal year 2021, they'll be delivering the flagship Disciplinary Case Management System, or DCMS, that will allow legal professionals to work and track cases from investigation all the way to adjudication. It will start off as a minimal viable product

and grow from there. Yes, there will be a learning curve. Yes, there will likely be some bumps along the way. And yes, there will be some change. However, if we view this as a long-term strategy to enhance our legal abilities, some short-term effort should go a very long way.

[upbeat music]

That concludes our interview with Colonel Sheri Jones and Mr. Dan O'Connor. Thank you for listening. We'll see you on the next episode.

ANNOUNCER:
Thank you for listening to another episode of The Air Force Judge Advocate General's Reporter Podcast. Please subscribe to our show on **iTunes** or **Stitcher** and leave a review. This helps us grow, innovate, and develop an even better JAG Corps. Until next time.

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GLOSSARY

- **A6:** Communications Directorate
- **AFCIMS:** Armed Forces Claims Information Management System
- **AFJAGS:** Air Force Judge Advocate General's School
- **AMJAMS:** Automated Military Justice Analysis & Management System
- **CAC:** common access card
- **DCMS:** Disciplinary Case Management System
- **FLITE:** Federal Legal Information Through Electronics
- **IT:** information technology
- **JA:** Judge Advocate (The Judge Advocate General's Corps)
- **JAG:** judge advocate general
- **JAJM:** Military Justice Law and Policy Division
- **JAS:** Legal Information Services Division
- **KM:** Knowledge Management
- **MAJCOM:** major command
- **MVP:** minimum viable product
- **POC:** point of contact
- **SAF/AA:** Administrative Assistant to the Secretary of the Air Force
- **UI:** user interface
- **VTC:** video teleconferencing
- **WebLIONS** : Web-based Legal Information Online System