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CMSgt Lisa List



MSgt Troy Tobaben

AFJAGS Podcast: Episode 43

The Paralegal Air Force Reserve Component with CMSgt Lisa List & MSgt Troy Tobaben - Part 2

HOST: MAJOR RICK HANRAHAN

GUESTS: CMSGT LISA LIST AND MSGT TROY TOBABEN

Part two of the interview with CMSgt Lisa List and MSgt Troy Tobaben on the paralegal career field within the Air Reserve Component.

MAJOR (MAJ) RICK HANRAHAN:

This is part two of the two part interview with Chief Master Sergeant Lisa List and Master Sergeant Troy Tobaben on the Air Force paralegal career field within the Air Reserve Component. Here are a few clips from part two of the interview.

[short intro background music]

SHOW EXCERPT, MASTER SERGEANT (MSGT) TROY TOBABEN:

So it's not just about the job or doing a task. It's about making those connections and meeting people and gaining some new experience.

SHOW EXCERPT, CHIEF MASTER SERGEANT (CMSGT) LISA LIST:

Why paralegal? It's definitely unique, aside from other AFSCs in, not just in mission but even our very makeup.

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](#).

LEADERSHIP

MAJ HANRAHAN:

Great points there, Master Sergeant Tobaben. And you mentioned leadership, which is one of the themes of this show. So I'd like to ping this over to Chief List.

Chief List, who's had a number of leadership positions. Could you maybe opine on one or two of those positions on, as a paralegal, how you've been able to grow as a leader?

CMSGT LIST:

Absolutely. Paralegals, my husband likes to remind me on a regular basis, are different. The JAG Corps itself is a little bit different, but especially on the enlisted side, where from the very start, you're dealing with commanders, you're dealing with first sergeants. Where our judge advocates outnumber us two to one. So we are actually the minority of our JAG Corps, where the vast majority of AFSC's, the enlisted corps make up the majority. The officers are very few and far between. So that is very unique. You have to definitely hone your customs and courtesies. You're always on parade. And you really got to make sure that you learn your communication skills well.

When you move up to the Numbered Air Force where Sergeant Tobaben is right now, what happens is you go from one office to 36. So a NAF has several wings under them. So you're not just focusing on one office, you're focusing on many. The basic skills are there, but you need to make sure that you are thinking a little more, a little less hands-on, a little more strategic. You're looking for vacancies. You're looking for training, negative training trends. You're looking—where your sight is focused on is different. It's a little less on the job and more of on the people.

And that's what I really love about the leadership role, is you have an opportunity to help people. It may not be what they want. It may not be because the needs of the Air Force is always going to be considered. But what I love about the JAG Corps is, if we can meet the Air Force needs, the JAG Corps needs, and the members needs, we're going to do it. End of story. Because we want them to continue on and be a part of our family. They are important.

I don't know if that's really getting after what you're looking at, but how I rose through the ranks was applying for positions that are, even temporary tours, that would kind of get my name out there as a manager of people.

I love the people—a helper of all the Airmen and I say all the Airmen, big "A"—my officers, the enlisted, the civilians. As a senior enlisted leader especially, you have a unique opportunity to mentor up and down. And I just I just love it. I just love doing that and helping folks be successful. Meet their goals.

And once you start getting that out there, our career field is small. The good and the bad get out there very quickly. You start getting noticed. You get started getting offered different opportunities. And as long as you're, it's part of your goal and you're willing to take advantage of those opportunities, you will definitely go on the path to bigger and greater things.

MOST INTERESTING ASPECT

MAJ HANRAHAN:

Thank you, Chief and for Master Sergeant Tobaben, what has been one of the maybe the most interesting aspects of work you've had to do within the paralegal career field?

MSGT TOBABEN:

You I think the most interesting aspect is, I mean, I loved the research, and I love having the opportunity to deal with the people. And I go back to my time at the Air Force Academy. I think the most interesting aspect was learning that environment. I went in with these, with this preconceived notion of this is how it is, you know, that we practice military justice in the field. And at that point it was black and white for me. This is, this is what we do.

But you go into a learning environment like it is there. You're dealing with not only the military justice issue. You start dealing with academic issues and academic integrity. And and you start to realize that the Air Force is more than just military. I mean, we're building leaders were building people with a specific set of knowledge and skills. And I think for me, it was, it helped me gain a larger appreciation for who we are as an organization. I mean, we have a school that is specifically helping to produce these leaders and these people that are able to move us forward.

That was probably the most eye-opening experience I've had in the Air Force and something that just kind of helped me get the bigger picture.

ADVICE TO SELF

MAJ HANRAHAN:

Thank you. Great perspective there as well. Chief List, if we could go back in time to when you were an airman. Okay. 17-year-old airman, right? What advice would you give to yourself now that you are chief on how to be successful in this career path?

CMSGT LIST:

I would say to be more of an open communicator, right? So when I came in, it was went in did your job and you didn't sit there and complain. You didn't talk about any stressors in your life. You didn't, you know, it was get the job done. And if you were you were stretched razor thin, it was just get it done.

And that's it. We have grown leaps and bounds, not only as a career field in the corps, but in the Air Force at large to where we are understanding that is not necessarily the right answer, that communication is good. And while the answer still may be, well, it's still got to get it done. It's important to allow the Airmen their voice, no matter what level.

Again, when I say Airman, I'm always talking about Air Force, civilian and enlisted folks, to at least express themselves in a way to where they, even though they may understand they still need to get this task done, that there are a second and third order effects that may occur if we don't get the task done. But afterwards, then we're like, okay, what can we do better, to make it so is not as stressful or overwhelming or whatever?

I think that's would be, it's just, and it's hard to tell a 17-year-old airman be a better communicator, but that it saves an astounding amount of problems, up and down the chain, is just effective communicating.

MAJ HANRAHAN:

Thank you Chief. Master Sergeant Tobaben, if you could go back and talk to your younger self [laughter]. How would you discuss the notion of maybe where you weren't exactly sure what you wanted to do or where you saw yourself in five or ten or 15 years? How would you talk to that younger version yourself to still kind of set yourself up for success?

MSGT TOBABEN:

Looking back, two things. Number one, take all the opportunities that are available to you. And I look at my time in the Navy and there's a running joke that the Navy stands for "Never Again Volunteer Yourself." So it when the opportunities came up, you just you kind of kept your head down and looked the other way when they asked for volunteers.

But, you know, I've since learned that that's not always the right thing. It's, you have the opportunities, even if it's a job that you don't want to do or is mundane, you still have the opportunity to make those connections and maybe connect with somebody that could propel your career or your personal life forward. So it's not just about the job or doing a task.

It's about making those connections and meeting people and gaining some new experience. But by the same token, one of the regrets I have looking back at my military career is I didn't always listen to the senior enlisted or officers above me. It was I always had this, like these blinders on, right? This is the direction I'm heading. And no matter who's spoken to my life saying, "Hey, maybe you should look at this" or "Look at this opportunity", or, you know, kind of trying to offer a bigger picture, brighter, broader horizons, I didn't always listen to that.

And I would definitely tell myself, you know, looking back, "Hey, you need to listen to these people. They know what they're talking about" and, you know, gain some direction from them. And I think that's the biggest thing that my entire military career has offered me. And

hopefully I would be able to instill that. I mean, you know, do we always listen? No. But it would be nice to go back in and kind of point that out.

MAJ HANRAHAN:

So would you say it's appropriate to say you would have taken a more active role in your own personal development and mentorship?

MSGT TOBABEN:

Absolutely. I would have. It, I was offered with a lot of opportunities that I didn't take that I wish I had. And it's definitely you have the opportunity to grow. And as Chief List pointed out several times, this is all what you make it. And I would argue that in any military service, whether it's active duty or reserve, this can be whatever you want it to be and you can drive that.

APPLYING FOR PARALEGAL PROGRAM

MAJ HANRAHAN:

Well, thank you for those are those great insights.

So, Chief, let's say we've got some listeners potentially are thinking about the paralegal career field and maybe the paralegal reserves. How would they go about applying for that?

CMSGT LIST:

Right. Well, the first thing would definitely be to reach out to a recruiter. We have a Reserve Paralegal Program Manager who interfaces with all the recruiters. Our career field is different in that it is centrally managed. And so the recruiters, they have our checklist. We have a lot of requirements because of the sensitive nature of our jobs and who we interface with. Like I mentioned, where we're dealing with commanders, first sergeants, authorities. And we are interacting with our officers, our judge advocates, our attorneys are all officers. So we want to make sure we have the right people. And many times in our traditional reserve offices, the positions are limited to just one or two paralegals. So we need to make sure that they have the skill set and the demeanor that we're looking for.

But I digress. So reach out to a recruiter and our program is centrally managed through our Reserve Paralegal Program Manager, and that's where it starts.

RESOURCES

MAJ HANRAHAN:

Thank you, Chief.

Well, obviously today we still kind of just scratched the surface on this topic. We did not get into all the different nuances of this career field. With that, if listeners want to learn more about today's topic, and I'll provide this question for both guests, where would you recommend listeners go to learn more about today's topic?

CMSGT LIST:

Well, we have a [recruiting site](#). Also, if you want to find facts about the different opportunities, the different categories, the Category A, the Category B, and absolutely the benefits that go along with the Reserve, especially if you're you have an ambition to go to college. We have the GI Bill. We have, also TRICARE for our Reserve dental services. So medical for your family.

It's just, there is just—if you're not in a place in your life where you want to serve, but serving full time is not conducive to your life. Many of our paralegals are, you know, very high level civilian. They're attorneys. They have full-time jobs. They're taking care of families. They're going to college to where a full-time service is not necessarily an option. But you still have that desire to serve. And those benefits are amazing.

I'm sorry, but I've been in the civilian world. There is nothing that compares to it, not just the benefits monetarily, but also just the family you make. The pride of service. The meaningful service. I can't even, I can't even talk enough about it. It is just amazing. No regrets.

MAJ HANRAHAN:

Master Sergeant Tobaben and any resources that you think would be beneficial for our listeners just based on what we just talked about today.

MSGT TOBABEN:

I still argue the best resources, people, right? Trying to reach out to people that are actually in the profession and that are doing the job. I mean, they offer you the frontline view of what's going on. So don't be afraid to reach out to paralegals that are out in the field, whether it's active duty side or reserve side.

I'm sure we could find ways to get in contact, get that information out to people to get a point of contact. But it's, this is a great opportunity. It's a part time—well, I say part time deal. I think most of us probably volunteer more of our time than just the required one weekend a month, two weeks a year. And I think that's just our love for the job.

Yeah. And as Chief said, no matter what you're going through in life, I think this is this is a good opportunity to—it's very flexible. If you have something going on in your civilian world and you can't dedicate as much time to it other than just what's required to you, that's okay.

But if something in your life changes then and you have extra time and you want to dedicate it, there's the opportunity to do that as well. And just, not only that, all the benefits you get from it as Chief mentioned. It's just, this is a great opportunity.

FINAL THOUGHTS

MAJ HANRAHAN:

And final question for both guests, and I'll start with Master Sergeant Tobaben here. Just any final thoughts you have on today's topic on the paralegal career field from the reserve perspective or maybe even active duty of people are considering that, or just anything that we've talked about or maybe that we'd even get a chance to talk about.

MSGT TOBABEN:

You know, like I said, it's worth exploring. If you're at a point in your life that you're looking to still maintain some ties to the military or, you know, that you're looking even for a new career field or something new. I mean,

as I said, I am a IT specialist and this is definitely well outside of my wheelhouse and something completely different. But that's what I love about it. You know, I get the chance to do research and work with some amazing people. So just again, explore all your opportunities.

And if you're coming into the career field and like me, you know nothing about it. Just know that there are opportunities for training and learning. I mean, currently we have the seasoning program, right? Once you go through your three level school, you have the opportunity, if you have time and are able, to serve it an active duty office for a while to get that experience and that knowledge. And even if you're not able to do that, I wasn't in the position to take seasoning orders at the time and just took the opportunity to go over to the active duty office a couple of weeks at a time throughout my learning phase. And I learned a great deal. It's an amazing opportunity that if you're looking for something different to do, this is the career field.

MAJ HANRAHAN:

Thank you. And the same question over to Chief List. Any final thoughts or comments on today's topic for our listeners?

CMSGT LIST:

I can only echo Sergeant Tobaben's words. It's a great opportunity. Why paralegal? It's definitely more, it's unique aside from other AFSCs, in not just in mission, but even our very makeup, which is predominantly officers. It's a very professional environment. We take great pride in our training The JAG School.

Our initial skills training was just increased to I believe now 13 weeks it was six weeks. Feedback from the field was that those initial skill trainings were so valuable and needed upfront rather than at the craftsman level, that we went ahead and revamped the entire training system. And also, its American Bar Association accredited training, so it's professional, you get your Community College of the Air Force degree from it. And we just we really instill a lot of value on our Airmen.

It is great. It's all that and it's, the whole environment and I just can't encourage folks enough. I'm an institution-wide cheerleader. I love the Air Force, period. I love the JAG Corps. I love the paralegal corps. You just can't go wrong.

But with any bureaucracy, there will be hiccups. And like I said, communication is key, right, to not let anything be—there is nothing that is not fixable unless you wait until it's a complete disaster. So that goes for life in general, but let us help you. And I have my JAG School or I have the [recruiting page](#) which is very easy. It's AF Reserve dot com slash JAG, that's J A G slash. You can explore paralegal and the JAG, the attorney and any of that information is out there.

Definitely, you can reach out to me. Knowing somebody is, as Sergeant Tobaben said, is the best resource. You want somebody who lived it and breathed it and will give you the down and dirty. So I love the career field so much then I'm quite sure that you can ask just about anybody. And even if there's negative aspects, the positives always outweigh.

MAJ HANRAHAN:

Well Chief List and Master Sergeant Tobaben thank you so much for coming on and speaking with us today and that will conclude today's interview. So thank you again for coming on.

CMSGT LIST:

Thank you, sir.

MSGT TOBABEN:

Yes, sir. Thank you.

TAKEAWAYS

MAJ HANRAHAN:

That concludes our interview with Chief Master Sergeant Lisa List and Master Sergeant Troy Tobaben. Here are three of my takeaways from the interview.

NUMBER ONE, flexibility offers great opportunity.

A theme within this interview is the great flexibility offered by serving in the Air Reserve Component as a paralegal, including as a traditional reservist, member of the Air National Guard, or individual mobilization augmentee or IMA. As your life and work situation evolves over time, you can transition into different components of the ARC that best fit your situation. And perhaps even take on an active duty assignment or two along the way, if that becomes of interest to you.

NUMBERTWO, no career path is the same.

Both Chief List and Master Sergeant Tobaben discussed their unique career progressions. Master Sergeant Tobaben started off in the Navy outside of the legal career field. He then transitioned into the civilian sector for over a decade. After an 11-year break in military service, he joined the Air Reserves as a Category A knowledge operations specialist, and then he later cross-trained into becoming a paralegal. This would hardly be considered a quote unquote "normal" career track. But he's been very successful along the way, and it highlights that no career path is the same.

Chief List started on active duty and wanted to continue serving in that role. However, due to family needs, she transitioned into the Reserves and through the Reserves. She's worked in many incredible positions, including an active duty AGR tour, a tour at The Air Force JAG School and within different components of the Reserves. Through all these different experiences, she's risen to the leadership position of IMA to the Senior Paralegal Manager, to The Air Force Judge Advocate General. Her unique career path shows that no path is the same and that you can find success through your own journey.

AND LAST, THE NUMBER THREE leverage life experiences and grow in new skill sets.

Both our guest worked in the private sector along their career journeys, and they both leverage their civilian experiences outside of the military into the paralegal career field. And as an inverse to that, they also both

gained valuable new skill sets within the paralegal career field that they otherwise would not have had the opportunity to learn.

And these skill sets in turn, such as enhanced communication, management of people, and leadership have helped them develop further, both professionally and personally. As Chief List mentioned, if you have any interest in the [Air Reserve Component](#), check out AF Reserve dot com backslash JAG and click on paralegal. It offers a lot of useful info, including qualification for prior service and for those of non-prior service. It offers information on the application package, requirements, required training, and how to apply if interested.

And if you perhaps have an interest in active duty as a paralegal, check out Air Force dot com backslash careers, then go to what interests you and click on law and order, and then the [career paralegal](#).

In conclusion, it should go without saying, that the Air Reserve Component is an integral part of our country's national security mission in air, space and cyberspace. And if you have an interest in serving your country in the enlisted legal career field, but active duty isn't the right fit, then the ARC is a great way to get involved.

Thank you for listening to another episode. If you like this episode, please let us know by leaving review on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or your favorite podcast platform and consider subscribing to the show. We'll see you on the next episode.

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ANNOUNCER:

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[music ends]

GLOSSARY

- **AFJAGS:** Air Force Judge Advocate General's School
- **AGR:** Active Guard and Reserve
- **ARC:** Air Reserve Component
- **IMA:** individual mobilization augmentee
- **JAG:** judge advocate general
- **LOS:** Law Office Superintendent
- **MAJCOM:** major command
- **NAF:** Numbered Air Force
- **NCOIC:** noncommissioned officer in charge
- **SJA:** Staff Judge Advocate
- **TJAG:** The Judge Advocate General