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AFJAGS Podcast: Episode 85 JAG Accessions & Incentives

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An interview with Major Aneisha Bell on the accession programs, as well as some financial incentive programs the Air Force JAG Corps has to offer.

[Intro music – The Air Force Song (Instrumental)]

Introduction

Major Alexxa Pritchett:

Hello everyone. Welcome back to the Air Force Judge Advocate Generals podcast. I am Major Alexxa Pritchett, and today I'm here with Major Aneisha Bell, who serves as the Chief of Recruiting for the Air Force JAG Corps. Today we are going to be talking about the accession programs, as well as some financial incentive programs the Air Force JAG Corps has to offer.

Major Bell, can you introduce yourself and give us an overview of what we'll be discussing today?

Major Aneisha Bell:

Yes, sure. Thank you, Major Pritchett. I am Major Aneisha Bell. I'm the Chief of Recruiting for the Air Force JAG Corps. Today we're going to be talking about some of the ways that someone, whether it's a service member

or a civilian, wants to join the Air Force JAG Corps, as well as some of our financial incentives that the JAG Corps has to offer.

Thank you so much for allowing me to share these programs. I hope once people listen, they have a better understanding of how to apply and what the JAG Corps has to offer. And then as requested, I'll give you an overview of some of those programs for each service member or civilian that is interested.

Maj Pritchett:

Let's first chat through what the options are for civilians with no current military affiliation.

What is the Direct Appointment Program all about?

Direct Appointment Program (DAP)

Maj Bell:

Yes. Our Direct Appointment Program, or the DAP program, is for 3Ls who have completed at least two thirds credit hours towards their J.D. or also licensed attorneys who are interested in applying to the JAG Corps.

For the DAP program, we have three cycles a year. Sometimes we have a supplemental board in February for interested 3Ls and attorneys as well. But like I said, that's three times a year. The requirements for that program is you have to be able to commission before your 42nd birthday. It used to be 40.

And that's the question that I get all the time. Is the age limit still 40? It was increased to 42. As long as you commission before 42, you're good to go. You have to graduate from an ABA accredited law school. Then after you graduate, you have to pass the bar and be sworn into the highest court of any U.S. state. You also have to be a U.S. citizen.

And then that is just the first part of the requirements to apply. If you are selected for the JAG Corps, you have to be able to pass medical or be medically qualified, as well as be able to pass our physical fitness test. Those are the initial requirements to join through the Direct Appointment Program.

Graduate Law Program (GLP)

Maj Pritchett:

Awesome. And then what about any programs for civilians who maybe aren't as far along in their legal career, whether they're still in law school or looking to go to law school?

Maj Bell:

We have some Reserve Officer Training Corps programs or what we call our ROTC programs. So for those, we have a Graduate Law Program for 1Ls.

With that program you essentially apply in your first semester in November. And then if you're selected for that program, you'll start your ROTC requirements in your 2L year, the beginning of your 2L year. And then you'll continue until you graduate law school. You'll do those courses on top of your law school courses as well. So it is a challenging program. Once you complete all requirements, you'll pass the bar and then you'll onboard as a JAG. You won't have to reapply. You essentially have a contingent job offer in your first year.

One-Year College Program (OYCP)

Maj Bell:

For our 2Ls, we have the One-Year College Program or the OYCP program. And it's the exact same program as the Graduate Law Program.

It's just a little bit more accelerated where you will complete all of your ROTC requirements in just your 3L year. So, you'll apply your 2L year, same timeframe in November. And if selected, you'll continue the ROTC requirements that third year, as well as completing your law school courses. And then upon graduation, passing the bar, you're on board as a JAG as well.

Maj Pritchett:

And so for those two programs, is it possible to apply without having prior ROTC experience in college?

Maj Bell:

Absolutely. That is essentially most of our JAGs. At least for myself, I didn't have any ROTC background, no military affiliation in my family. I knew nothing about the JAG Corps at all.

Most of our JAGs coming in, they have no prior military service, no ROTC, no anything. If that is a worry for people out there, no worries at all. The ROTC detachment will get you all trained up and get you ready to go when you onboard as a JAG.

Educational Delay (Ed-Delay)

Maj Pritchett:

Switching gears a little bit, what about opportunities available for current service members?

Maj Bell:

I'll start with our cadets. If we have applicants that are interested that are in undergraduate and they are in a ROTC program, a 4-year ROTC program, they could potentially be eligible for our Educational Delay program. So, in their senior year of undergraduate, they will apply—same timeframe, application opens in November.

And then in their second semester of senior year, they'll know whether or not they were selected for the Educational Delay program. And that program is essentially delaying their active duty start time to after they go to law school. Let's say they're in their senior year, they graduate and they're picked up for this program. They will begin law school and then they will do the entire three years in law school.

Then once they're in their final year of law school, they'll apply for the Educational Delay Out program. And essentially that means, "Hey JAG Corps, I finally graduated law school. Now I want to be picked up as a JAG." It's a two-part process for that program because you actually have to apply in your senior year for Educational Delay-In. And then if you're selected and finish law school, you apply for Educational Delay-Out to actually onboard as a JAG. That is for any of our undergraduate students.

Funded Legal Education Program (FLEP)

Maj Bell:

Then for our service members that are active duty, we have the Funded Legal Education Program (FLEP), available to both enlisted members and officers. For that program, you have to have served at least two years on active duty, but you can't have served more than six years.

And that time and service requirement is not waivable. I know I get that question a lot, but there's nothing that we can do with the JAG Corps to waive that requirement. So to be eligible for that, the main one that is a stickler for most people is that you have to have served two years.

You also have to get a conditional release memo from your career field manager. Essentially that memo can come in an email or an MFR, but it just has to be signed by a person who can actually release you from the career field. You'll attach that memo to your application. That's essentially the Funded Legal Education Program.

We also pay for all three years of law school. Your tuition, your books, all that will be paid for. Members that are selected are not able to pay out-of-pocket for anything. If there's a school that you really want to go to and it's outside of the budget, you can get a scholarship or maybe in-state tuition if the school allows for that. But you can't use your GI Bill or pay out-of-pocket to cover the additional costs outside of the budget that the Air Force allows. There's also a service commitment of six years after law school for officers. For enlisted members, it's going to be a 10-year service commitment. That's really the only difference between the two, when we're talking officer/enlisted.

Excess Leave Program (ELP)

Maj Bell:

And then another program that we have for officers that are active duty is our Excess Leave Program (ELP). ELP is what we call it for short. For that program, you have to be in the grade of O-3 and below, served at least two years, no more than 10 years for this program.

A little bit different from the FLEP program – the cap is six years. This cap is 10 years. However, there are no pay and allowances allowed. You're going to be the one funding the cost of law school. You can use your GI Bill and any other scholarships and things you may receive from the school.

It's solely you paying out of pocket. And then once you graduate, you'll come back on as a JAG. That program is out there for folks. Again, I know it's not, "Tuition is covered," but at least it's an opportunity for active duty service members who are interested and maybe have missed the cutoff. I've seen that a lot of times where some people are over the six years, but they're still really interested. This is another option that they have that gives them a little bit more time to achieve that goal to become a JAG.

JAG Application Process

Maj Pritchett:

That's awesome. Thank you so much for going over those with us. We've talked a little bit about the applications. Can we walk through what the application process looks like and if it's different for any of the specific programs you had mentioned today?

Maj Bell:

The application is essentially the same for ROTC, Direct Appointment, Funded Legal Education, Excess Leave Program, Educational Delay. All of those, you'll go to the same website. On that website it will break down which program you're applying to. It'll say Direct Appointment, ROTC, Educational Delay, and then you just click on the one that you're applying to so that when you submit the application, it goes to that board and not a different one. The application itself is very similar to any other job you would apply for. There are different sections of the application. For example, you'll need a head to toe photo. There'll be a section for your personal information, education—where you submit your law school transcripts, as well as undergraduate transcripts.

There's also a portion for extracurricular activities. But once you've completed all the sections and uploaded your documents, you'll select an active duty legal office that you want to interview with. Then after you submit your application, that legal office will be notified that they have an applicant that wants to apply.

They will reach out to you before the first of the month the board meets. And then they will set up that interview. You'll go in person. You'll do the interview. Then they will submit a report. That they've discussed certain things with you, what kind of experience you have. So the board can see additional information that may be outside of your application. That is typically what the application looks like. And then whenever the board meets, we make notifications roughly 30 to 45 days after the board closes.

Application Tips

Maj Pritchett:

Great. In terms of the application, from your perspective, what are some of the things you see that would be good tips for individuals who are interested in applying to the Air Force JAG Corps to really look at when doing their application?

Maj Bell:

I'll split that in two parts. Some of the things that can help an applicant—we are always looking for litigators. If you have litigation skills or if you are just trying to figure out what courses to take in law school. Any clinics, moot court, mock trial, all those things are helpful. If you have leadership roles in extracurricular activities. Whether it's your basketball team, or you were on law review, but you held some type of position. Those things are considered highly because as an officer, we're looking for: leadership, someone who has those leadership qualities, someone who has good communication skills, organization skills.

You're going to be talking to and advising commanders. Someone who's able to articulate and communicate really well. We're also looking for those types of qualities.

Things that can help someone in their application as far as documentation—letters or recommendations. It is optional to include those. But I highly recommend including letters of recommendation, as well as a writing sample.

One, because I look at it like someone who does not have any letters of recommendation, it's not to say you won't be selected because it is optional. However, to have someone be able to speak highly of you to the board helps your application, especially compared to some people who do not have letters of recommendations. Or who may only have one. I definitely encourage anyone who's thinking about applying to get at least three to four recommendations, if you can.

The writing sample does not have to be a legal writing sample. It can be a master's degree writing sample or some body of work that you've done.

It does not have to be published. However, most students will have a legal writing sample by the time that they're applying. Even if it's in your 1L year where you did your writing and research course, you can use that sample. You can tweak it, make it better, and submit that as a writing sample.

And then also the motivational statement. This is where you shine. This is what separates you from the other applicants. Why did you want to join? Were you inspired by a movie or a family member or just anything that kind of tells why you are interested in the Air Force JAG Corps. Make sure that you are speaking to the Air Force JAG Corps and not the Army, not the Navy.

Proofread these motivational statements before you submit them. And it's okay if you're applying to the different services, but just making sure that you are paying attention to that detail of who you're submitting it to. Those are some of the tips for the application I could give.

SJA Interview Tips

Maj Pritchett:

I appreciate that and you had mentioned that there is a SJA interview at a local legal office near wherever the applicant is living. Is there anything an individual can do to help prepare for that SJA interview?

Maj Bell:

Do a little bit of research about the JAG Corps in general. This is another time for you to shine. To show the SJA or the Staff Judge Advocate what it is you know about the JAG Corps. I think coming in prepared, confident. One of the things that we see, it's not often, but we do see it, is where people are late to the interviews.

Be on time. Ask questions. If there's something that you are not familiar with, or if you're interested in maybe what the SJA has been, you know, what assignments they've done, what the mission of the base is. Just anything that shows that interest that you have. That is how I would say to prepare.

But it's just like any other interview you do for another job. They'll go over a list of questions to make sure you understand what it is you're signing up for, what experience you have—to make sure that you're serious about this and you understand what you're raising your hand to do.

Application Timeframe

Maj Pritchett:

Major Bell, thank you so much for kind of going over that application process. What are the general timeframes of these applications?

Maj Bell:

We have three boards a year. Then we do a supplemental board in February. I'll just start chronologically based on the calendar year. Our February board, the application opens 1 November through 10 January of the previous year.

So, 1 November through 10 January will meet a February board. After the February board, we have our April board. That application opens 1 February through 10 March, and that application will meet our April board. And then we also have an August board. That application opens 1 June through 10 July for the August board. And then the November board application opens up 1 September through 10 October.

And then those are just for the direct appointments. But then for all the other programs that we talked about, the Funded Legal Education, Excess Leave Program, Educational Delay, Graduate Law Program, One-Year College Program, those applications are once a year. The applications for those open 1 November through 10 January, and they meet the February board.

Maj Pritchett:

And if someone doesn't get selected on the first time they've applied, are they able to apply for the next board?

Maj Bell:

Absolutely. You can apply as many times as you are eligible. The main thing that cuts most people off is the age limit. But a lot of applicants and students that we see are mid-twenties to early thirties.

So they're fine. But if we're thinking about attorneys that are thinking about applying, again, they can apply as many times as they want, as long as they're eligible. But the 42-age limit is the requirement.

Maj Pritchett:

Is there any method of feedback that individuals can get for someone who maybe applied and was not picked up and is interested in applying again?

Is there any way that they're able to get feedback on their first application?

Maj Bell:

Yes. Thank you for mentioning that. That's a great question. Yes, if there's an applicant who was not selected, they will receive an email from me or whoever's in my seat. Then I will send out a link where they can sign up to receive feedback, if they want it.

And then if they are not able to sign up for the timeframe that I have, they can always reach out to me individually or respond to that email that I send out, basically saying, "Hey, I need another time and date," and I'm always happy and willing to go through their application and try to help them make it stronger for the next round.

Maj Pritchett:

That's amazing. Thank you so much for putting that information out there. In terms of the application and the most up-to-date information, what is the best way for individuals to keep up to date on that?

Maj Bell:

We push out information multiple ways. The fastest way that they can get the information is from our social media pages. We have a Facebook account, as well as an Instagram account. I post all of the application links and websites once they are open. I also post the requirements, when the application is open. And then I also push the information out to the career service officers (CSO) at the law school.

Reach out to your career service officer. They should have my contact information as well as maybe a flyer that I've sent to them about our application cycles. And then our legal office recruiters that come out to the law schools and the ROTC Detachments, they also have this information.

I post all of the flyers and send that out to them so that when they're traveling and visiting these schools, they have the information to provide the students, and any alumni or people that are interested in applying. But if for some reason an applicant misses all of those things, they can also reach out to our org box or just call our office directly at (703) 614-2385.

Or they can email our org box at af.jag.recruiting@us.af.mil.

JAG Corps Incentive Programs

Maj Pritchett:

Thank you so much, and I will make sure that I tag all of those social media platforms as well as the contact information on this podcast so our listeners have easy access to that as well. So we've talked through the how, but let's get into a little of the why.

Are there any incentives to join the JAG Corps?

Maj Bell:

Yes. We have a couple of different incentives aside from 30 days of vacation, the healthcare, all of those things that any military service branch has to offer.

Student Loan Repayment Program (Up to \$65,000)

Maj Bell:

JAG Corps specific, we have what we call a student loan repayment program.

This is where the Air Force JAG Corps will pay up to \$65,000 worth of student loans back. How that program works is after the first year that someone has completed in their four-year contract, they can apply for this program. And then essentially there's a calculation to determine how much a JAG will be eligible for.

But whatever amount that is, it will be paid out over the last three years of their four-year contract. We will pay it directly to the financial institution. It won't go to the JAG themselves, but we'll pay that directly to them. And then it's just paid out over the last four years. So that is one program that we have.

JAG Continuation Pay (Up to \$60,000)

Maj Bell:

And then another program that we have is called JAG Continuation Pay. And that program will be eligible to JAGs that have completed their first four-year contract. Essentially after you complete your first four years, or roughly once you're coming up to your fourth year, you'll receive an application for you to determine if you would like to do the continuation pay.

Essentially what that is, is if you sign up for an additional two years on active duty, you'll get a \$20,000 bonus. You can use that for whatever you want. It doesn't have to be paid back towards your loan. It is taxable, but you'll get that money directly. And then after those two years, if you sign up for an additional four years, you'll get a \$40,000 bonus.

Same deal, goes right to you. You can use it for whatever you want. And then that essentially puts you at the 10-year mark, which could potentially make you eligible for the public service loan forgiveness program. So that alone gets you up to 125k worth of incentives back to the member.

Maj Pritchett:

That's awesome. And are you able to take advantage of both of those programs concurrently? So can you do the student loan repayment program, but also get the JAG Corps continuation pay?

Maj Bell:

You absolutely can do both. They come at different times. So the student loan repayment is going to be in your first four years, and then once that's over, then you'd be eligible for the other two if you continue on active duty.

Maj Pritchett:

Amazing. And for anyone who is interested to learn a little bit more about both of those programs, can those be found on your social media pages or online?

Maj Bell:

Yeah, so they are online. We also have brochures that we push out. So if anybody wants additional information, by all means they can reach out to me. But we do have our financial incentives brochure on our website. The CSOs in the schools that I also push this out to them and the legal office recruiters as well.

Bar Dues Reimbursement (Up to \$450 Annually)

Maj Bell:

And then there's one other program that I didn't mention. But it's our bar dues reimbursement. We pay up to \$450 annually towards student bar dues (your licensing, your bar dues). So essentially, you will pay whatever your bar dues are for that year and then you'll submit the receipt on this website that we have. And then after you submit all the documentation and it's processed, you'll

be reimbursed whatever the amount that you pay for those bar dues. That's another program that we do have.

General Application Advice

Maj Pritchett:

Thank you so much. Major Bell, before we wrap up today, what is just some general advice for someone who's just interested in getting started, what's the best first step someone can take to potentially joining the Air Force JAG Corps.

Maj Bell:

I would say definitely be proactive. Get ahead of the documentation that you'll need. The one that I see the most is the letters of recommendation. So I'll see, let's say an applicant applies, they have no letters of recommendation and they're not selected, right? That is the very first thing that I give back in the feedback, and most times what I hear from the applicants is that the recommender didn't get the letter back in time, or something along those lines, right? Or they waited too late to ask.

I would say get a head start on asking for those because you can use them within the year. If you ask for them over the summer and you don't plan to apply until November, or for our August board, they're still good to go. But that gives the person writing them ample amount of time to get this back to you and make sure that you have it before you submit your application. Another thing about the letters of recommendation is we cannot take any of them in our actual office. They can't be mailed in, they have to be submitted through your application.

They have to give them to you, you scan them, upload them to your application, and that is how you complete the application. The letters of recommendations are the biggest ones to get those in time.

Proofreading your motivational statements, that is key. As well as the writing samples, if you're going to submit a writing sample. Also, I would say shine in your SJA interview. Just be yourself. Be confident. Show them what you know. Ask them questions. The SJA interview is really, they're the only person that gets to interact with you before the board meets. They're the only person that has that one-on-one interaction with you.

The board doesn't get to meet you personally, they only see these documents that you submit. They only see your application. The SJA interview is a great time to show some of that personality, ask some of those questions, and really just shine so the SJA can make notes to the board about how awesome you are.

Those are just some of the tips that I have, but if anybody has any questions or needs help going through this process, they can always feel free to reach out to me. I'll give you the org box or you can tag the org box on the podcast so that they know who to reach out to. I'm always happy to chat with folks and give them any advice or tips that I see as I give feedback to folks that aren't selected.

Conclusion

Maj Pritchett:

Thank you Major Bell for all of that information. Listeners, today we've gone over some of the accession programs, as well as some of the financial incentives that the Air Force JAG Corps has to offer. If you have any questions or want more information, please feel free to visit the Air Force JAG Corps recruiting Facebook page, the other social media platforms, or reach out to Major Bell with the contact information that'll be posted below.

With that, Major Bell, thank you so much for your time today and talking through these opportunities.

And for listeners, we'll talk soon.

Glossary

- **1L:** first year student in a Juris Doctor program at a law school
- **2L:** second year student in a Juris Doctor program at a law school
- **3L:** third year student in a Juris Doctor program at a law school
- **ABA:** American Bar Association
- **AFJAGS:** Air Force Judge Advocate General's School
- **CSO:** career service officer
- **DAP:** Direct Appointment Program
- **FLEP:** Funded Legal Education Program
- **GLP:** Graduate Law Program
- **JAG:** judge advocate general
- **J.D.:** Juris Doctor
- **MFR:** memorandum for record
- **O-3:** captain (Army, Air Force, Marines) or lieutenant (Navy, Coast Guard)
- **OYCP:** One-Year College Program
- **ROTC:** Reserve Officer Training Corps
- **SJA:** staff judge advocate

Show Notes

Air Force JAG Corps Recruiting

- Recruiting Office: (703) 614-2385 or (800) 524-8723
- Email: af.jag.recruiting@us.af.mil
- Online Application: <https://jagusaf.jag.af.mil/>
- Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/USAFJAG/>
- Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/airforcejagcorps>
- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/afjag>

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