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# AFJAGS Podcast: Episode 86 OTS Student Perspective

**Host:** Major Alexxa Pritchett

**Guest:** Captain Rachel Book

An interview with Captain Rachel Book on what to expect when you arrive at Officer Training School (OTS).

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

## Introduction

### **Major Alexxa Pritchett:**

Welcome back listeners to The Air Force Judge Advocate General School podcast. I'm Major Alexxa Pritchett, and today I'm joined by my special guest, Captain Rachel Book, who is a graduate of the Officer Training School (OTS) class of 25-06. By the end of this episode, our goal is that you, the listener, will have a better understanding of what to expect when you arrive at OTS to begin your Air Force career as an officer.

Captain Book, congratulations on graduating from OTS and being in the JAG Corps for about a year now. Can you tell us what program you entered through and a little bit about your legal background prior to commissioning?

### **Captain Rachel Book:**

Absolutely. So I came in through the direct appointment program (DAP). I applied the summer before my 3L year of law school. I submitted my application probably around late June, early July. I found out I got accepted around September. After that I had to finish out my last year of law school, take the bar, and I got my results early October. I found out my assignment from the JAG Corps and my OTS start date, I think it was around the middle or end of October. And I started my OTS class on the 18th of November of 2024.

Before that, I hadn't really had much time practicing law. I kind of tried to find some odd jobs to do before getting picked up for OTS because a lot of people don't want to hire people temporarily I found out—if they know that you're going to be joining the military. That was a bit of a struggle.

But luckily I had my husband who was supporting us during that time, so I did some volunteer work for an attorney that I knew just to try to get some more experience before going through training.

**Maj Pritchett:**

You mentioned there was some time before going to OTS. What were you expecting as you were preparing to go to OTS? Had you heard much about it prior to that?

**Capt Book:**

I had heard a little bit. My husband is military and he had gone through OTS a couple years before I did. But when he went through it was a totally different curriculum. That was something I knew going in was that it might not be exactly like his experience. But he explained the physical side, what to expect there.

And then just long days. There were little bits that were different because OTS went to the module system instead of having, I guess what his situation was, was less about different sections of OTS—where you graduate from one module to the next. But for the most part, that was my only understanding of what OTS was going to be like; expect long days and be prepared to be uncomfortable.

## First Impressions at OTS

**Maj Pritchett:**

Let's talk about that first week—your first impressions. What were you thinking the first day of OTS at the end of the day, what were your thoughts?

**Capt Book:**

Oh my gosh! I remember thinking, how has this only been one day? It was an early start, not as early as some of the days at OTS, but you show up, you have your bags and you're checking in and it feels like everything's just a whirlwind.

As soon as you get to the check-in desk, you get shuffled up to a room where you drop your stuff. And then I remember from there we went to the auditorium where we just waited for everybody else to process through.

And then we went and picked up uniforms and that was all before, I think 10:00 am. And there were little parts throughout the day where I was like we've done so much today!

How is this possible? And I think that was a pretty regular experience throughout those first couple of weeks. There's a lot you can get done when you wake up at 4:30 am and go, go, go throughout the day. But that first day I remember laying down and being like, "Okay, made it through the first day—nothing terrible happened." I was asked in an elevated volume, on that first day, why my back was really wet because it had been raining and the shirt that I chose was not super moisture wicking. So that was probably the standout experience on that day.

**Maj Pritchett:**

That's fair. And I feel like you can never prepare for certain things and no matter what, they might have found something. So at least it was just your shirt.

**Capt Book:**

Yeah, exactly.

**Maj Pritchett:**

Did you have to adjust the way you were approaching OTS after those first few days?

**Capt Book:**

I don't know if I had to change how I approached it. I had to let it sink in what was happening. Because it's pretty different, obviously.

If you're used to the civilian world, you're not used to being told exactly what to do every step of the way. And I think that might take some adjustment. But knowing what OTS' experience was going to be like for my husband, I had kind of a warning about that. And then throughout those first few days, it was like, okay, if I just keep my head down, do what I'm told—it's a very painless experience. And honestly it was kind of a relief after law school and having to be thinking about doing things every day. And to just be told what to do.

I don't know if everybody felt that way, but I know some people have said the same thing. It's kind of a relief to just know where you have to be and be there.

**Maj Pritchett:**

Yes. I went in with the mindset of I wanted to just be a blade of grass versus a weed at OTS, and I feel like that served me very well. Because it was just like playing a game every day. You listen to the rules, you play the game and it turns out okay.

**Capt Book:**

Exactly. That was probably my husband's most helpful piece of advice too. Just keep your head down, don't draw attention to yourself in a bad way.

## Day-To-Day Life at OTS

**Maj Pritchett:**

Right. So let's talk about day-to-day life at OTS. From your perspective, what was a typical day—understanding you mentioned modules that it might change throughout the process?

**Capt Book:**

Pretty standard schedule for us was wake up at 4:30 am, do morning accountability, which basically just meant whoever was the flight leader at the time (because that changed throughout the OTS class), you would basically just report in for morning accountability, make sure everybody was awake in your room. And then we would go to physical training (PT). And in the beginning that looked like class PT—everybody was doing the same thing. And as the modules went on, we got more privileges. You could go to the workout room on the campus and do weightlifting, if that's something you liked. Or go to the track and run. Everybody had to know where you were at all times, but you had the ability to select what you were doing. And then, typically, you get time to clean up. Do morning chores around the dorms. So just make sure everything was clean and put away until about 6:00 am.

And then we went to breakfast, which was normally around 30 minutes, and then regularly scheduled programming, whatever that was depending on the module. For the beginning, it's a lot of academics and you go through that until lunchtime, and then there's probably more academics or maybe some activity that goes until dinner, which is around 5:00 pm.

Then the evenings were normally free for doing more chores, making sure that the dorms were clean, laundry, if you needed to do it. And then maybe socializing, if we had the time. The early modules, we definitely didn't. But towards the end of the OTS process, you definitely have a little bit more free time during the academic modules—which was the second and the third and the fourth. But more the second and third, you're busy studying.

We would study as a flight a lot of times and just make sure that we were ready for the next day. Because there's readings that you have to do sometimes for homework. And lights out around 8:00 pm. So if you wanted to, you could definitely go to bed as early as 8:00 pm, depending on the day.

Sometimes there was more stuff going on that would prevent that. But I spent a lot of my evenings just calling home, checking in, getting some family time, and then would head to bed.

**Maj Pritchett:**

It sounds like the two bulk experiences you have are PT and academics. I want to talk about those individually.

Starting with PT, how demanding was OTS physically for you?

## Physical Demands of OTS

**Capt Book:**

I think preparation was key there. I didn't have a hard time with the PT requirements because it was geared to have everybody at least complete whatever we were doing. But I also had the opportunity to really make sure

I could prepare well. I would make sure that I could run at least a mile and a half without getting too exhausted.

Do pushups, situps—just anything that would pop up on the PT test. And then any physical challenges that we were doing, were as a team. We're all working together, making sure that everybody gets across that finish line.

## How is OTS Different from Law School?

### **Maj Pritchett:**

And then as far as academics go, understanding JAGs who are coming through OTS obviously went to law school, so academia is not something that we necessarily aren't familiar with. How was it different, academic wise, from an OTS perspective versus a law student?

### **Capt Book:**

That was one of the funny things about OTS. We were told JAGs and medical officers struggle the most on tests because we read too much into the questions and they warned us like, "Don't overanalyze it!"

Read the question that's being asked. Don't try to read too much into the different answers for multiple choice and just make sure that you're not providing the lawyer answer, which would probably be, "It depends," for a lot of these questions. And you want to find the gray area but there's always a right answer and you just have to be able to find it.

And then the other thing, I think a lot of lawyers want things to be fair. And sometimes I think the OTS curriculum is geared to challenge that presumption and just make sure that you can continue to operate even when things aren't necessarily fair. I know some of my friends who are JAGs now, we struggle with that a little bit, but you learn from the experience around you and the prior enlisted that are in the room saying, "You just gotta get through it. It's not the end of the world." But as far as academics, just don't overanalyze.

### **Maj Pritchett:**

What would you say to a JAG coming into OTS who feels like they might struggle with that kind of mental exercise that you're going to go through when you go to OTS?

### **Capt Book:**

My advice would probably be to rely on your team. The people around you are always there to help. And if anything is a struggle, just try to find that person that you can talk to and potentially get advice, get some help. At the end of the day, at least in my flight, we all wanted to succeed as a team, and there's not a lot of awards for individual success along the way.

It's more so focused on teamwork, and part of that is studying as a group, making sure that everybody understands the material that we're learning. Essentially, you don't leave anybody behind. And if somebody feels like they are getting left behind, then making sure that they have the ability to vocalize that and reach out if they need help.

## Officer Training with Integrated Career Fields

### **Maj Pritchett:**

That's a great segway. You've mentioned "team" a few times, and for our listeners, at OTS, you are put into a flight of all different OTS students who aren't necessarily part of the same career field.

So Captain Book, how did you integrate with officers from the other career fields to find that common ground throughout OTS?

### **Capt Book:**

It was pretty easy along the way when you're forced into these groups, so you want to get to know everybody. And the different backgrounds that we had, at least in my flight, we had people who were going to be pilots, people who were going to be JAGs. We actually had a lot of JAGs in my OTS class.

Just benefiting from the experience of everybody in the room, especially the people that had prior service under their belt. They were invaluable a lot of the time, especially for us coming from the civilian world, people who didn't have a lot of experience with the military going into OTS. They had a lot of great insight.

I think as a JAG, you oftentimes are put into situations where you have to interact with people from different career fields and it's great. And having that opportunity to network. At OTS, one of the things they said that really stuck with me is you will likely never again be in a room with this many people who are so accomplished. Because the road to OTS for a lot of people is pretty challenging and requires a lot of effort and work to get there.

And it's a lot of people who have excelled in what they did in previous careers or in school, and I don't think that can be ignored from an experience standpoint of really benefiting from that and learning from how we were different and bringing that forward into your career.

## How is Success at OTS Defined?

### **Maj Pritchett:**

Yes, that is great advice because we are fortunate enough as JAGs to work with all different types of AFSCs. And it's really valuable having at least a foundational understanding of what career fields do, because they're all very different from us. I appreciate that insight. You've mentioned a little bit about success. You said there's not a lot of individual awards, but team awards.

From your perspective, how would you define a successful OTS experience?

### **Capt Book:**

I think it's what you take away from it and people might have different things that they want to take away. For me personally, it was the relationships that I got to build, especially with the people that I knew I was going to be going to JASOC with.

Because there were, I think, twenty-six of us who were JAGs in the same OTS class. We made an effort to really get to know each other and build that foundational relationship. And then the people in my flight, getting to interact with them and build some friendships that I could ... you know it might be hard to maintain moving forward because we're all going to different areas and some are reservists, some are active duty, but at different installations.

But anytime we come across each other, I wanted to have that ability to know the person that I had gone to OTS with and recognize them and have memories to fall back on and a relationship that we could grow moving forward. I had one friend in my flight who was coming from OSI (Office of Special Investigations).

He had so much wisdom from his life as a special agent, and then he was also going back to OSI as an officer special agent. I've gotten to talk to him throughout my time here at Holloman AFB, to pick his brain, ask him what his advice would be working with other special agents. And I know it would be an incredible experience to work with him moving forward.

Long story short, my goal coming to OTS was to push myself out of my comfort zone and also build those relationships with people moving forward.

## Helpful Habits to Thrive at OTS

### **Maj Pritchett:**

Did you have any habits that you developed throughout your time at OTS that led you to have a successful experience, that you weren't doing before OTS?

### **Capt Book:**

Yes, I think one of those was getting outside my comfort zone. It's because going through law school, you get into a rhythm and then this is obviously so different. It's not something that I had ever experienced before. So I knew I could just sit back and relax and watch people around me. But I wanted to come out of it knowing that I had

volunteered for things. I had done things that weren't necessarily something I would've ever done before. You get those opportunities like everybody has to take lead on some of the challenges that we undergo throughout the modules. That's like a mandatory voluntold situation. But I wanted to volunteer early and often, if I could. And then the physical stuff, I wanted to be an asset.

And that required staying on top of things, making sure that I was always pushing myself in the physical challenges. One that doesn't come naturally was questioning things. Which is kind of ironic because I think one of my pieces of advice would be not to question things. Especially as a JAG, just kind of learn to listen and follow.

Because that's part of the early part of OTS, learning how to follow instructions. Then you start to get more leadership challenges as the time goes on. But one of the things that I learned from my flight mates was to question how things have been done to come up with creative solutions and not just assume that we're going to do things right because that's how things have always been done.

And I don't think that's a muscle that I have exercised prior to OTS.

## **Best Ways to Prep for OTS**

**Maj Pritchett:**

That's a phenomenal answer. Thank you so much.

I want to wrap this all up with, and you've already given some really great tidbits of advice, but I want to take you back to before going to OTS. Now that you are a seasoned JAG and you've been in for a year. Is there anything you wish you would've done differently to prepare for your arrival at OTS, looking back at your experience now?

**Capt Book:**

Probably more pushups. I think I neglected that. The physical side is probably the element that's in most people's control before going to OTS. I think that can't be understated. If you know you have a date. Sometimes, maybe it's a quick turnaround. But if you are a JAG, if you've gone through the direct appointment process and you know you're going to be a JAG, then just get started running, doing pushups, doing sit-ups. Get into shape!

And then that's something you don't have to think about when you go to OTS, which is really nice. And then the packing list, getting that together. You always have the opportunity to buy more when you go to OTS. But having it all purchased and ready to go. That was something you didn't have to think about, it's just there.

And staying organized, because the first few days are so chaotic and there's a lot of moving around. So keeping things ... I know some people kept things in different containers so they were easy to access. I just had a bunch of plastic bags: I had all of my shirts in one bag, all of my socks in another.

And then when it came time to pack and move again, I just threw that all into my big green duffle and it was easy to access. So you don't have to worry about trying to find that one uniform item that is clean and you need.

## **OTS Packing List: Must Have Items!**

**Maj Pritchett:**

You mentioned a packing list. I know OTS provides you with a list of things to bring, but is there anything now that looking back you wish you would have brought that wasn't necessarily on the packing list and of course allowed by OTS to bring?

**Capt Book:**

Weather dependent, because I went through during the winter—that changed a lot of things that I would've emphasized. Like having base layers for the different deployments that you go on. I know for the summer they probably wouldn't need that. One thing that we struggled with was PT uniforms because they were in the process of issuing the new uniform.

I wish that I had had that. I wasn't able to purchase one because most installations didn't have it. But the first couple days you have the opportunity to switch into PT instead of being in the reporting uniform, which is, I think, khakis and a button down. So that would've been nice to be able to change. But that's probably just a luxury.

As far as anything that I wish I had packed, I know some people wish they had more warm things. So that's the base layer again. And then, blankets. There are blankets that you can get from the dorm stock, but they weren't very warm. That's something I know people would go out and buy when we had the opportunity to go off base later on.

Some people got some electric blankets because the dorms were pretty cold. But again, it was winter.

## **Favorite Part of OTS**

**Maj Pritchett:**

Gotcha. You'd mentioned some deployments, and I know you've talked about a lot of team activities. What was your favorite experience at OTS?

**Capt Book:**

I loved the deployments. I really had a great time just getting to be outside all day. That was probably, it was hard to go back to being in classrooms after the first deployment that we did because it was just so much fun to kind of be hanging out outside. We got to do some operations where we were walking around with our airsoft guns and practicing ground movements. And it didn't feel like camp, it felt like a break from sitting and listening to academics all day.

I really enjoyed that. And then in the evenings we usually had a lot more free time than we would back in the dorms because there was less tidying up to do, and we got to really get to know each other, throw around a football. Just have a blast, honestly, hanging out. I think that would probably be my favorite part was just being out of the dorms and off campus and kind of being in a more relaxed atmosphere.

## **Advice from a Recent OTS Graduate**

**Maj Pritchett:**

That is understandable given the kind of strict day to day that you normally have.

To wrap this all up, Captain Book, can you tell our listeners if you had the opportunity to talk to your past self, what is one piece of advice you would give yourself if you were to go through OTS again?

**Capt Book:**

I would rely on the feedback that I got at OTS, which was to stay positive and make sure you speak up. Because other than that, I don't have a lot of regrets from OTS. But when I got that feedback, it made me realize that a lot of times I can just tend to sit back and just listen and observe. And OTS is really the best environment to try new things and push yourself in a way that you wouldn't normally because it's a very safe environment.

Obviously, you're working with people that you might have to work with, so don't burn bridges! But it's great to explore the parts of leadership that maybe you haven't gotten to explore, parts of teamwork that you haven't maybe experienced. I think that would probably be the one thing that I would change.

Overall, I had a great time. I loved getting to know all the people in my class. I love the physical elements and embracing all of that is something that I'm proud that I got to do.

**Maj Pritchett:**

Capt Book, thank you so much for sharing your experience with us today. Your insight is incredibly valuable for future judge advocates preparing for OTS.

So for our listeners that are headed that way, best of luck to you as you begin your Air Force career. And for all of our listeners, thank you for joining us. That's all we have for today.

## Glossary

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- **3L:** third-year law student
- **AFB:** Air Force Base
- **AFSC:** Air Force specialty code
- **DAP:** Direct Appointment Program
- **JAG:** Judge Advocate General
- **JASOC:** Judge Advocate Staff Officer Course
- **OSI:** Office of Special Investigations
- **OTS:** Officer Training School
- **PT:** physical training

## Show Notes

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### ***Direct Appointment Program — Information***

- **Website:** <https://www.airforce.com/careers/specialty-careers/jag/licensed-attorney>

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