



## From the Chair...

by Donald J. Guter, RADM, USN (Ret.)

### Chair of the ABA Standing Committee on Legal Assistance for Military Personnel

All military legal assistance attorneys and offices undertake a profoundly important mission—keeping our service personnel legally fit and prepared to perform their duties without unnecessary legal distractions. The exemplary work of a handful of legal assistance professionals merits special recognition. Each year the Standing Committee on Legal Assistance for Military Personnel (LAMP) selects its Distinguished Service Award recipients from a pool of nominees submitted by the services. Here are the four recipients of the 2008 LAMP awards.

**Mr. George Sabga**, a volunteer lawyer at Naval Legal Service Office Southwest (“NLSO SW”), embodied the spirit of legal assistance by donating his immigration-law expertise to hundreds of clients in 2008 alone. A retired master gunnery sergeant and a lawyer, Mr. Sabga formerly served as an immigration adjudicator at the California Service Center. He has selflessly deployed that in-depth knowledge of immigration law and processes for the benefit of his NLSO SW clients, as well as for legal colleagues handling immigration issues. A typical example of Mr. Sabga’s dedication was his unrelenting and successful effort to arrange the release of a Navy spouse who had been wrongly detained in an immigration case. In comments supporting Mr. Sabga’s

nomination, Captain James Ryan recognized the best motives behind this lawyer’s volunteer service: “Mr. Sabga views the opportunity to provide legal assistance services as an honor, a privilege, and an opportunity to thank service members and their families for the many sacrifices they make while serving our country.”

**The Legal Assistance Program of the 6th Air Mobility Wing, MacDill Air Force Base (FL)**, in 2008 exemplified best use of legal technology combined with outstanding lawyering to enhance and expand legal assistance delivery. The 6th Air Mobility Wing team assembled an in-depth training regimen ensuring that their attorneys and paralegals were up to speed on subjects affecting their clients, utilizing weekly training sessions, live webcast briefings, and in-house training by active-duty attorneys and reservists, as well as formal courses at the Air Force Judge Advocate General School. The MacDill team also developed an exemplary legal assistance website loaded with information on legal assistance subjects, along with other military law areas, for the use of legal professionals as well as servicemembers. For example, the website features a Personal Legal Readiness Record, a handout used by legal assistance attorneys to help clients gather information required for personal estate documents and administration. The MacDill team has also effectively partnered with the Hillsborough County Bar Association, interacting with civilian lawyers and as appropriate engaging pro bono volunteers and arranging minimal-cost civilian representation in civil cases. The MacDill program also has been innovative in the area of outreach to clients, for example dispatching a legal team equipped with a laptop

and portable printer to prepare estate and power of attorney documents for a terminally ill client. Finally, MacDill created an electronic client-scheduling calendar that enhances the ability of lawyers and paralegals to effectively plan their client meetings. Technology was a driver of MacDill’s impressive array of legal services for a large client population, but the key to quality service was the program’s highly trained, innovative legal assistance team.

The LAMP Distinguished Service Award (“DSA”) earned by **Naval Legal Service Office Pacific** (“NLSO PAC”) recognizes timely and topical substantive innovation in legal assistance. NLSO PAC addressed emerging legal problem trends confronting a widely scattered constituency by developing comprehensive home foreclosure training and consumer credit training. The office developed exemplary substantive materials on the national foreclosure crisis as well as legal answers for those facing foreclosure issues. In 2008, the office also developed a hybrid full service/self-service tax center that focused tax counseling resources on those personnel with complex tax profiles, while offering effective self-help tools to sailors with more straightforward tax issues. The NLSO PAC Office warranted praise for its continued commitment to preventative legal programs. This office’s work in 2008 represented the type of nimble and responsive program-level initiatives on substantive legal issues that make a difference for servicemembers and their families in an evolving civil legal landscape.

**The Office of the Staff Judge Advocate, Warner Robins Air Logistics Center (GA)**, earned the LAMP Distinguished Service Award

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for 2008 through a creative array of new programming that organically enhances the quality and range of legal services available for clients. Those enhancements included:

- (i) engagement with the Georgia Expanded Legal Assistance Program, enabling Warner Robins lawyers to appear in Georgia state courts on behalf of their clients in appropriate cases;
- (ii) development of a comprehensive Legal Assistance Guidebook that became an Air Force exemplar distributed to legal assistance offices globally;
- (iii) proactive collaboration with the Georgia bar to connect

with civilian lawyer volunteers available to represent base personnel on civil matters;

- (iv) resourceful use of personnel regulations to add a legal assistance attorney position and to add three law interns whose positions ultimately transitioned into three permanent attorney slots, replacing retired lawyers;
- (v) development of a Georgia Attorney Advantage program to use Georgia-licensed attorneys working in other capacities on base to use their Georgia legal knowledge and bar status to help legal assistance clients as appropriate; and
- (vi) a significant reduction in the time required for personnel to make a legal assistance appointment. The Warner Robins team has shown

vision in its well-integrated, coordinated approach to legal assistance.

The LAMP Committee commends the 2008 Distinguished Service Award winners for showing the way to improved military legal assistance services. At the same time, we do not lose sight of the fact that each day thousands of legal assistance lawyers and paralegals, often facing unreasonable time and resource constraints, are zealously doing all they can to relieve the legal burden on their clients. There is no substitute for the passion and commitment of a legal professional. We thank them all for their good service and for taking pride in their most important mission.

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