

## **Navy JAGs Hold National Moot Court Competition**

*By Jen Zeldis*

The Navy Judge Advocate General's (JAG) Corps held its inaugural National Moot Court Competition, November 12–14, 2009, at Naval Air Station Jacksonville, Florida.

The winner of the overall competition was Stetson University College of Law. Duke University School of Law received the best brief award. In addition, Nicholas Mahrt of the University of Denver was recognized for best oral argument.

"I would definitely recommend this competition to other law students because I believe the additional preparation required for this competition is a great experience for anyone in law school whether they are interested in becoming a JAG officer or not," said Robert Williams, a Texas Southern University Law School student.

Twenty-three teams, representing a cross-section of the highest caliber and most diverse law schools (according to *U.S. News & World Report*), were selected to participate in the competition. More than twenty-seven judges, both civilian and military, listened to the oral arguments. They scored each round and provided substantive feedback to the law school students on their arguments after every round.

"The unique thing about this competition is its national scope and its focus on military justice—there is not another competition like this in the country," said Rear Adm. Nanette DeRenzi, the Deputy Judge Advocate General of the Navy. "Also, the thing that makes it truly a premiere event is the opportunity for the competitors to argue before sitting judges."

The competition consisted of four full rounds and three final elimination rounds with students arguing in front of a prestigious bench of judges, including a sitting federal judge, the Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces, and the Chief Judge of the Department of the Navy.

"What was accomplished was an event punctuated by an unparalleled assembly of practitioners and scholars in military jurisprudence," said Region Legal Service Office Southeast Commanding Officer Capt. Paul Kiamos.

To prepare for the competition, each team was given a record of appeal consisting of a post trial argument to the Navy-Marine Corps Court of Criminal Appeals. The problem was developed by Navy Judge Advocate Lt.j.g. Ian Maclean and followed a guilty conviction of a Navy lieutenant commander for violations of the Uniform Code of Military Justice article 106a (attempted espionage), article 95 (flight from apprehension), and article 112a (wrongful possession of controlled substances). He was sentenced to a dishonorable discharge from the military, fifty-three years of confinement, and total forfeitures of benefits. The appeal was on the evidentiary rulings made by the military judge including the suppression of physical evidence seized from the residence of the accused, refusal to suppress the physical evidence seized from the vehicle, and refusal to suppress the statements made by the accused to the Naval Criminal Investigative Service.

"The problem that has been given to them is one that, although it is a military law specific topic, involves general constitutional principals of self incrimination and search and seizure," said Andrew Effron, Chief Judge for the United States Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces. "So they get to apply the legal skills they have learned in law school, have those skills tested in competition with other students, and have experienced judges ask them tough questions and evaluate them in oral arguments."

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The law school students also had the opportunity to learn about life in the Navy during visits to Patrol and Reconnaissance Squadron Five (VP-5) and USS The Sullivans (DDG-68). Students considering employment opportunities with the Navy JAG Corps had the chance to participate in a formal interview for employment and network with judge advocates to learn more about the practice.

“The caliber of the competitors is just outstanding, and being able to interact with the JAG officers and learn about what they do on a day-to-day basis has been very exciting,” said Virginia Branham, a George Washington University Law School student.

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