

DIALOGUE

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From the Chair...

By Donald J. Guter, *RADM JAGC USN (Ret.)*

Standing Committee on Legal Assistance for Military Personnel

Military legal assistance done well can make all the difference in the life of a client and the performance of a fighting force. Client populations are best served when legal service commands and individual lawyers take up the challenge of getting beyond routine thinking and routine effort in the design and delivery of legal services. The ABA LAMP Committee understands that exceptional effort and extraordinary innovation in the legal service arena must be recognized and honored if legal service standards are to be elevated across services. Ultimately, that is the LAMP mission.

We on the Committee find few activities as meaningful and gratifying as the selection process leading to the announcement of the annual LAMP Distinguished Service Award recipients. The group and individual recipients have risen to meet extraordinary challenges by delivering outstanding service in a time when the need for effective legal assistance services is extreme.

Here is a summary description of the recipients of the 2009 LAMP Distinguished Service Awards. We salute them all for their exceptional performance.

Group Recipients

Coast Guard Legal Assistance Field Response Team for Lost CG-1705 Aircraft, Alameda, CA

The Coast Guard legal assistance response to the loss of seven members in a mid-air collision off San Diego was immediate, comprehensive, compassionate and extraordinary. The legal team was rapidly assembled when a Coast Guard C-130 and a Marine helicopter tragically collided off-shore on October 29, 2009. A legal assistance attorney was quickly assigned to the family members of each of the lost Coast Guard crew members. The Coast Guard committed to a robust legal assistance response to the incident, identifying and pursuing all administrative and legal issues on behalf of the crew members and their survivors, and closely advising Coast Guard Casualty Assistance Calls Officers on the array of benefits offered to family members. Over the course of a week, the team members spent 16 hours a day counseling, consoling and delivering appropriate legal support solutions for family members. The families dispersed after the Coast Guard's official memorial service in Sacramento, but the work of the legal assistance response team continued, with attorneys doing what was needed to legally support the families in the ensuing weeks and months. As one example, one attorney sought and secured special permission to appear in a distant court to pursue a petition to assign temporary guardianship of a lost crew member's infant daughter to her stepfather. The response effort, while straining Coast Guard legal assistance resources, was a superb effort in the greatest cause before any legal assistance service: Assisting the families of our fallen heroes.

Legal Assistance Division, Office of the Staff Judge Advocate, Maneuver Center for Excellence, Fort Benning, GA.

The legal assistance team demonstrated extraordinary resilience and capacity to adapt to adversity while keeping pace with a high operational tempo after the entire base legal office center was destroyed by arson in February 2009. The team was faced with responding to complete loss of historic files, client files, computer systems and servers, with no respite from the usual heavy demand for services. The team devoted two months of non-stop effort to recreating briefing materials and other preventive law materials as well as client files, while re-establishing routine practices and procedures. Office personnel continued to support soldier readiness programming for the CONUS Replacement Center and a 3d Brigade/3d Infantry Division deployment to Iraq, while team members traveled to Dahlonga, GA, to provide legal support at the Ranger Camp there.

The Fort Benning Maneuver Center for Excellence legal assistance team's refusal to let a devastating event become an excuse for less than outstanding service was exemplary, capturing the spirit of a fully engaged installation that never stops working for its soldiers.

3d Infantry Division and Fort Stewart Office of the Staff Judge Advocate Legal Assistance Team, GA

The Fort Stewart team is a beacon for any legal assistance program looking for a model of excellent service in an extremely challenging operational environment. The legal assistance office has delivered high-caliber support during the deployment of division headquarters to Iraq, as well as the deployment of every brigade to Iraq or Afghanistan. For deploying soldiers, the Fort Stewart team met the challenge of briefing all brigade units and family readiness groups, conducting on-site legal briefings, and preparing wills and on-site powers of attorneys, while performing re-integration briefings for returning soldiers. It should be noted that provision of ordinary legal assistance services becomes extraordinary when demand is relentless, stakes are high, and wars approach a decade in duration. On top of conventional legal assistance, the Fort Stewart has gone to extraordinary lengths in reaching out to families of soldiers killed and wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan, to address their probate and other legal interests in a thorough and compassionate manner. In 2009, The Fort Stewart, 3d Infantry Division team also expanded its SAFE (Soldier and Family Emergency) program, an exemplary collaboration of base, local law enforcement and judicial authorities and child welfare agencies designed to ensure that the dependent children of all Fort Stewart servicemembers are accounted for and cared for in the event that a parent is incapacitated and the other parent cannot be located or is unavailable to the child. Operation SAFE demonstrates the breadth and depth of the Fort Stewart team's commitment to soldiers and their families. It should also be noted that nearly 30 Fort Stewart Judge advocates and military paralegals accompanied troops wherever they deployed, coordinating with legal personnel in the Rear Detachment to ensure quality representation for soldiers in harm's way. The indefatigable Fort Stewart and 3d Infantry Division team's work is exceptional and worthy of emulation.

Consolidated Legal Service Office, Camp LeJeune, NC

The Camp LeJeune team has delivered innovative and exemplary legal assistance services in an unrelenting "high op tempo" environment. The team excelled in 2009 in delivering legal assistance to active duty personnel, dependents and reservists assigned to Marine Corps Installations – East, II Marine Expeditionary Force, 2nd Marine Division, 2nd Marine Logistics Group, U.S. Naval Hospital, and all other commands aboard Marine Corps Base Camp LeJeune, as well as a large retired community. In addition to the full range of conventional legal assistance services, the Camp LeJeune team is to be commended for its highly innovative work in the immigration law arena, in close coordination with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service. Importantly, in 2009 the team also went the extra mile to serve the complex and intensive legal needs of Marine wounded warriors who are no longer active-duty. For its consistently extraordinary work in demanding war-time circumstances, the Fort LeJeune team has earned LAMP recognition for distinguished service.

86th Airlift Wing, Ramstein Air Base, Germany

The Ramstein legal assistance team has developed creative and effective legal services in a unique multi-national, multi-legal-system, multi-lingual environment while serving the largest population of U.S. citizens outside the United States. The Ramstein team is particularly to be commended for its legal assistance support of wounded warriors transitioning through the adjacent Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, and on-target provision of German legal assistance, for base personnel dependents and retired servicemembers with issues arising under the German legal system. The Ramstein team's highly effective use of a German attorney and German-law specialists has helped de-mystify German legal issues for base personnel and families residing in a foreign legal culture and efficiently resolve legal matters in areas such as landlord tenant law, consumer and contract law and family law. Ramstein has also done exemplary work in delivering preventive law services with a German law focus to the base community. The Ramstein legal team is to be commended for providing exceptional services in a highly demanding and diverse legal environment.

LT Garrett S. Snow, JAGC, USN, Naval Legal Service Office Pacific, Yokosuka, Japan.

Lieutenant Snow made an indelible mark on the officers and clients of NLSO Pacific through the scope, quality and impact of his legal services delivery and leadership, and his numerous program innovations for the benefit of soldiers and their families. In addition to training junior attorneys and legalmen and personally assisting hundreds of clients himself, LT Snow harnessed the media by working with the Armed Forces Network to develop a guide on how to secure an Individual Tax Identification Number, a key resource for non-citizen spouses of American sailors. The guide has been made widely available on television and radio and in newspapers throughout the office's area of responsibility. Significantly, Lieutenant Snow led the challenging effort to persuade top officials at Yokosuka City Hall to resolve a bottleneck in the issuance of local marriage certificates. Those negotiations resulted in an agreement that the local government would streamline the marriage certificate process and develop a user-friendly checklist to assist applicants. The resultant agreement, a product of LT Snow's powers of persuasion in a foreign legal setting, will continue to benefit the base community going forward. During a three-week deployment aboard the USS George Washington, LT Snow produced public service announcements with legal information that continue to benefit sailors via the ship's television channel. In addition to a formidable workload, he dedicated 20 hours or more per month to volunteer activities, including support of the Boy Scouts, career counseling work at a high school, and clearing hiking trails in the vicinity of Navy housing. LT Snow exemplifies outstanding legal assistance, both in the quality of his work and in his deep dedication to helping others, and is to be commended.

LtCol Adam E. Torem, USAFR, 11th Air Force, Elmendorf Air Force Base, AK.

Lieutenant Colonel Torem performed exceptional and ground-breaking service in the cause of military legal assistance. As Chair of the Legal Assistance to Military Personnel Section of the Washington State Bar Association, LtCol Torem shepherded ground-breaking legislation through the Washington legislature to protect the rights of military parents who deploy; led his bar section's continued dynamic support of a community-based effort to deliver extended legal assistance to deployed national guardsmen and their families; maintained the vitality of the conditional state bar admission program for JAGs stationed in Washington state; and drafted legislation to strengthen the state's version of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act. On both the program and policy side, LtCol was an innovative force for enhanced military legal assistance.

The Committee thanks and commends all of the recipients of the 2009 LAMP Distinguished Service Awards, who are most deserving. For more information on the LAMP Distinguished Service Award and to view past award recipients, please visit www.abalegalservices.org/lamp/distinguishedserviceaward.html.

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