

Lore of the Corps

The Origin of the Corps' Distinctive Insignia

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When wearing the Army Service Uniform, every judge advocate, legal administrator, and paralegal wears the Corps' "Regimental Distinctive Insignia" (RDI) above the top left pocket flap of the blouse. But this is a fairly recent development, as the Corps had no such insignia until 1986. Just how a small blue enamel shield with a gold-colored crossed-pen-and-sword came to be the Corps' RDI is an interesting piece of our lore.

In the years when the Army was re-building after Vietnam, senior leaders looked for novel ways to enhance morale and esprit de corps among Soldiers. One initiative, approved by the Chief of Staff in 1981, was to create a "U.S. Army Regimental System" in which Soldiers in the combat arms were affiliated with a "regiment" and then were expected to serve recurring assignments with that regiment.¹ While the regimental affiliation idea naturally worked best with infantry, armor and artillery, the Army expected combat support, combat service support, and special branches like the Judge Advocate General's Corps (JAGC) to also carry "on the activities and traditions of a regiment."²

On 30 May 1986, the Department of the Army announced that the Corps "is placed under the US Army Regimental System effective 29 July 1986."³ This explains why on that day in July—on the 211th birthday of the JAGC—Major General (MG) Hugh R. Overholt, The Judge Advocate General (TJAG), announced that the Corps had joined the Army's new regimental system. As the *Army Times* reported a few days later, the JAGC was the seventh "branch-oriented organization" to join the system and, at the time, consisted of 3,730 active-duty Soldiers, 4,278 National Guardsmen, and 1,772 Army Reservists.⁴

When MG Overholt announced that the Corps was now also a regiment, he also revealed that "formal affiliation ceremonies" would take place during the Corps' "Worldwide" annual conference in October 1986 in Charlottesville, Virginia.⁵ The planning for this "Regimental Activation Ceremony" had been underway for some time, because "accouterments" for the new "JAG Corps Regiment" were required for the ceremony, including an RDI to be worn by Soldiers to show their regimental affiliation.

Initially, the Corps' leadership considered adopting the Distinctive Unit Insignia used by The Judge Advocate General's School as the RDI. Ultimately, however, this idea was rejected in favor of designing a new RDI. This explains why an article in *The Army Lawyer* announced that there would be a Corps-wide "competition" to design the RDI. This competition was "open to all members of the JAGC (active, Reserve and retired)" and "suggested crest designs" had to be submitted "by the end of June 1986."⁶ While a number of drawings were submitted, it seems that the winning design came from Colonel (COL) Richard "Dick" McNeely and Major (MAJ) Ronald Riggs, both of whom were assigned to the International Law Division in the Office of The Judge Advocate General (OTJAG). As then-MAJ David Graham remembers he was at lunch in the Pentagon one day and heard MAJ Riggs say to COL McNeely: "Hey, we can win this competition." McNeely agreed, and the two men sat down and sketched out a design on a small piece of paper, perhaps a napkin, with a ball point pen. They then submitted the design to OTJAG for consideration.⁷

¹ Although regiments have existed in the American Army since the Revolution, the idea for a regimental system in which Soldiers spent most of their service in one unit became increasingly popular in the post-Vietnam era. For more on the concept, see U.S. DEP'T OF ARMY, REG. 600-82, THE U.S. ARMY REGIMENTAL SYSTEM (5 June 1990) [hereinafter AR 600-82].

² AR 600-82, *supra* note 1, para. 2-3f.

³ Headquarters, U.S. Dep't of Army, Gen. Order No. 22, para. 3 (30 May 1986) (This general order also formally established "Charlottesville, Virginia" as the "home" of the JAGC.).

⁴ These total numbers included 4,639 commissioned officers, 197 warrant officers, and 4,944 enlisted Soldiers. Jim Tice, *Legal Specialists Join Regimental System*, ARMY TIMES, Aug. 1986, at 2.

⁵ *JAGC Regimental Activation*, ARMY LAW., May 1986, at 16.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Interview with Colonel (Retired) David E. Graham, Executive Dir., The Judge Advocate Gen.'s Legal Ctr. & Sch. (TJAGLCS), in Charlottesville, Va. (Apr. 6, 2012) [hereinafter Graham Interview]. Mr. Graham had a distinguished career as a judge advocate, and served in a variety of important assignments including Staff Judge Advocate, U.S. Army Southern Command (1990-1992) and Chief, International and Operational Law Division, Office of the Judge Advocate General (1994-2002). Mr. Graham has been the Executive Director, TJAGLCS, since 2003.

The McNeely-Riggs design—consisting of a shield upon which the crossed-pen-and-sword insignia was centered, with the letters “JAGC” above the insignia and the numerals “1775” below it—won the competition. Then-MAJ Michael Marchand⁸ took the design to The Institute of Heraldry for that office to use in creating the Corps’ RDI.

The Institute’s initial proposed RDI design, however, deviated significantly from the McNeely-Riggs drawing. On 28 July 1986, the Institute proposed to MG Overholt that the RDI consist of a dark blue shield containing *both* a “balance” and the crossed-pen-and-sword insignia. The balance—or weighing scales—would be *above* the crossed-pen-and-sword and both would be centered on the shield.⁹ The Institute design also did not have the letters “JAGC.” It did, however, have the numerals “1775” on a scroll at the base of the shield.

Major General Overholt did not like the scales in the proposed RDI design and asked the Institute to redesign the RDI without them. The result was that, on 13 August 1986, the Institute returned to MG Overholt with two proposed designs: the pen and sword in *silver* on a blue shield with the numerals “1775,” and the pen and sword in *gold* on a blue shield with the numerals “1775.” After MG Overholt selected the gold pen and sword design on 21 August, the Corps had its “Regimental Distinctive Insignia.”¹⁰ In the words of the Institute, the official description and symbolism of the new RDI were:

DESCRIPTION

A silver color medal and enamel device 1 1/8 inches in height consisting of a shield blazoned as follows: argent, an escutcheon azure (dark blue) charged with a wreath of laurel surmounted by a sword bendwise point to base and a quill in saltire all gold. Attached below the shield is a dark blue scroll with the numerals “1775” in silver.

⁸ Michael J. Marchand had a thirty-two-year career as a judge advocate. He served in a variety of important assignments, including Assistant Judge Advocate General for Civil Law and Litigation (1997–1998) and Commander, U.S. Army Legal Services Agency & Chief Judge, U.S. Army Court of Criminal Appeals (1998–2001). Major General (MG) Marchand completed his service in uniform as The Assistant Judge Advocate General (2001–2005). After retiring from active duty, MG Marchand was appointed as the President of the Center for American and International Law located in Dallas, Texas.

⁹ This design is somewhat similar to the short-lived judge advocate insignia adopted by MG Walter A. Bethel in 1923. See Fred L. Borch, *Crossed Sword and Pen: The History of the Corps’ Branch Insignia*, ARMY LAW., Apr. 2011, at 3–5.

¹⁰ Graham Interview, *supra* note 7.

SYMBOLISM

The quill and sword symbolize the mission of the Corps, to advise the Secretary of the Army and supervise the system of military justice throughout the Army. Dark blue and silver (white) are the colors associated with the Corps. Gold is for excellence.

On its website, the Institute added that the motto “1775” “indicates the anniversary of the Corps.”¹¹ More accurately, “1775” reflects the year that the Continental Congress appointed William Tudor as the first Judge Advocate General of the Army—thus marking the beginnings of the Corps in the Army.

On 9 October 1986, MG (Retired) Kenneth Hodson and Sergeant Major (SGM) (Retired) John Nolan, the first Honorary Colonel of the Corps and first Honorary SGM of the Corps, respectively, unveiled the approved design for the RDI. In the months that followed, MAJ Marchand worked closely with The Institute of Heraldry to see that the RDI was manufactured. Actual production of the RDI did not begin until mid-1987, when the Institute of Heraldry authorized insignia manufacturers N.S. Meyer (hallmark M22) and Vanguard (hallmark V21) to produce the RDI for commercial sale.

While members of the Regiment immediately began wearing the new RDI on the Army Green Service Uniform (more often called the “Class A” uniform), there was some resistance to wearing the RDI on the “Class B” light green uniform shirt. Following the Air Force example, the Army had transitioned from a Class B khaki shirt and trousers to a light green short sleeve uniform shirt on which medals and decorations were not (at least initially) authorized to be worn. This uncluttered look pioneered by the Air Force was popular and some judge advocates, legal administrators and legal clerks did not want to wear the RDI on their shirts. This attitude changed, however, after a directive from OTJAG signaled that the new RDI would be worn by all.

¹¹ *Judge Advocate General*, INST. OF HERALDRY, <http://www.tioh.hqda.pentagon.mil/UniformedServices/Branches/JAG.aspx> (last visited Aug. 9, 2012).

Almost twenty-five years later, the distinctive uniform of all members of the JAGC Regiment—a proud Regimental insignia continues to be an integral part of the symbol of who we are and what we do.

More historical information can be found at

The Judge Advocate General's Corps
Regimental History Website

Dedicated to the brave men and women who have served our Corps with honor, dedication, and distinction.

<https://www.jagcnet.army.mil/8525736A005BE1BE>