

Our JAG Corps Regimental History

From the Regimental Historian & Archivist

Our history. As POW-MIA Recognition Day was Friday September 15, 2006, this episode from our past is timely.

Judge advocates stationed in the Philippines in World War II were loyal, faithful and even heroic; all suffered as prisoners of war

Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7, 1941; shortly after mid-day on December 8th, Japanese air attacks on Clark and Iba airfields on the island of Luzon brought war to the Philippine Islands.

There were eight judge advocates serving in the islands at the time: COLs Emil C. Rawitzer and Thomas A. Lynch; LTCs Peter Koster and Albert Svihra; MAJs Frank G. Aigrisse, Carlos E. McAfee, Arch M. McKeever; and CPT Samuel L. Heisinger, Jr.

Rawitzer was the senior Army lawyer and served as the "Philippine Department Judge Advocate." Lynch was his Executive. Svihra, Koster and Heisinger served on the Philippine Department Board of Review (the forerunner of today's Army Court of Criminal Appeals). The other Army lawyers served on the general staff of the Philippine Department or as judge advocates with U.S. Forces in the Philippine Islands.

Until American forces surrendered on 6 May 1942, these men took on a variety of non-legal duties in addition to their judge advocate work.

COL Lynch, for example, was



COL Thomas A. Lynch, shown here as a major in 1924, was captured by the Japanese and held as a POW from 6 May 1942 to 20 July 1945. He survived imprisonment and died in 1962 at age 80.

"Transportation Assistant to the Quartermaster" during the movement into Bataan. He was wounded by bomb fragments during an enemy attack on 29 December 1941 and was decorated with the Purple Heart.

MAJ McAfee served as a liaison officer during the defense of Bataan and was awarded the Silver Star for gallantry in action. As only two judge advocates received the Silver Star for combat heroism in World War II, this was a noteworthy accomplishment.

All eight judge advocates were captured by the Japanese when U.S. forces surrendered on 6 May 1942.

Only Rawitzer, Lynch, and McAfee survived the war. The other five Army lawyers died in

captivity. MAJ Aigrisse died in a POW hospital in Japan on 4 February 1945. LTC Koster and MAJ McKeever were both killed on 15 December 1944 when the Japanese ship on which they were being transported was bombed by American aircraft and sunk in Subic Bay, Philippine Islands. LTC Svihra was killed on 24 October 1944 when the Japanese vessel on which he was being transported was torpedoed by a U.S. submarine in the South China Sea. CPT Heisinger died from a variety of illnesses on 12 January 1945 while being held as a POW in Taiwan.

While few members of the Regiment remember today that judge advocates have been held as POWs during wartime, this is a part of our history that should not be forgotten.

Annual lecture update. The Maj. Gen. George S. Prugh Annual Lecture in Military Legal History will be held at the LCS on Wednesday, April 18, 2007. A well-known scholar and expert on military law has agreed to give the first lecture. More information to follow.

By Mr. Fred Borch, JAGC Historian, TJAGLCS

