

Our JAG Corps Regimental History

Lessons from history

Professional historians are always uncomfortable when asked what “lessons” may be learned from history: there are so many variables in past events that it is difficult to extrapolate to the present—much less the future. But history can be relevant to what is happening today, and a quick look at “rule of law” programs during the war in Vietnam may offer some insights into current events.

In 1964, then-COL George S. Prugh, the Staff Judge Advocate at Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), was convinced that a successful counterinsurgency program required respect for law and order. As a result, Prugh established an “Advisory Division” in his office, the purpose of which was to help the South Vietnamese improve their troubled civil and military justice systems. Prugh worked directly with his counterpart at South Vietnam’s Directorate of Military Justice. He helped establish a “Legal Society” in which prominent members of South Vietnam’s legal community met regularly with American lawyers and discussed current legal issues and the rule of law in American society. Perhaps more



Then-COL George S. Prugh implemented a major rule of law program during his tenure as the Staff Judge Advocate, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam from 1964 to 1966. Prugh served as TJAG from 1971 to 1975.

importantly, Prugh assigned Army Judge Advocates as field advisors at major units outside Saigon and tasked these lawyers with assisting their South Vietnamese Army colleagues in monitoring military discipline in Vietnamese units. The Judge Advocates also were to look for ways to ameliorate the pervasive administrative corruption in the South Vietnamese government. These Army attorneys also participated in security operations and helped Vietnamese lawyers to obtain transportation to better perform their jobs. Army Judge Advocates even obtained construction materials for local prisons. A number of Vietnamese Army Judge Advocates also traveled to the Judge Advocate General’s School in Charlottesville, where they attended both the Judge Advocate Officer Basic and Advanced courses. The

bottom line: Prugh and the MACV Judge Advocates looked for ways to use their legal skills to instill in the South Vietnamese a respect for the rule of law—in order to enhance mission success. As the Judge Advocate General’s Corps now looks for ways to create a respect for the rule of law in Iraq, studying what Prugh and Army Judge Advocates did more than 40 years ago may well be worthwhile.

By Mr. Fred Borch, Regimental Historian, TJAGLCS

Military Legal History Lecture. The first Maj. Gen. George S. Prugh Annual Lecture in Military Legal History was a tremendous success. Prof. Gary D. Solis, Library of Congress Scholar-in-Residence, examined the history of Judge Advocates who have been court-martialed for duty-related misconduct. His entire lecture, with footnotes, will be published in a future issue of the *Military Law Review*.



Left to right: Professor Gary D. Solis, guest speaker, Ms. Stephanie Beech and LTC (Ret) Patt Prugh, daughters of GEN Prugh, and Mr. Damien Walsh, LTC (Ret) Patt Prugh’s husband, pose for a photo following the first GEN George S. Prugh Lecture.

Send me your history: If you have an interesting piece of JAG Corps history, including photographs, please send it to me at...

Mr. Fred Borch
Regimental Historian
 600 Massie Road
 Charlottesville, VA 22903-1781
 Email:
 Fred.borch@hqda.army.mil