

From the Regimental Historian and Archivist: JAG Corps Birthdays — Then and Now

While one might think otherwise, it appears that celebrating the July 29th birthday of our Corps has not always been a high priority – even at our Regimental home in Charlottesville. We do know that celebrating the birthday was important to Major General Myron C. Cramer, who served as The Judge Advocate General from 1941 to 1945, and that the 169th birthday party (1944) was a gala affair in Washington, D.C. Since a short article published in 1944 states that the anniversary of the founding of the Corps “was observed by members of the corps stationed throughout the world,” it is likely that the birthday was celebrated at The Judge Advocate General’s School (TJAGSA), then located on the campus of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

But after TJAGSA was opened in Charlottesville in 1951, July 29th parties seem to have been a rarity. Brigadier General (retired) Ronald Holdaway, who served on the Criminal Law faculty from 1967 to 1969, does not “recall any [JAGC birthday] celebrations ... until quite late in my career. Even then, it was, as I recall, pretty much a Pentagon thing, and, so far as I know, no one else took much, if any notice of it.”

Similarly, Major General (retired) William K. Suter, who served as the Commandant from 1981 to 1984, also does not “recall celebrating the birthday when [he] was at the School.” As General Suter puts it: “Quite frankly, we had too many social obligations, including the USMC [Marine Corps] birthday and Australian national day.”

COL Sharon Riley and SGT Christina Garcia cut the birthday cake on 29 July 2013



BG Stuart Risch cuts the birthday cake with SSG Christina Garcia on 29 July 2014

Major General (retired) Wilton Persons, who served as TJAG from 1971 to 1975 and is one of our most senior living members of the Regiment (he is 90 years old), remembers celebrating the 200th Anniversary of the Corps in 1975. He does not, however, remember that the birthday was celebrated at other times during his long and distin-

guished career in the Corps.

Since the mid-1990s, however, there has been increased interest in observing the founding of our Corps on 29 July 1775 and, today, virtually every post, camp, and station with an Army Judge Advocate presence celebrates the “JAG Corps Birthday.” At TJAGLCS, the Command Judge Advocate has overall responsibility for the event, and the birthday celebration is held in the Atrium, usually late in the morning. It involves a cake-cutting ceremony presided over by the ‘senior’ member of the Corps. Since the transformation of TJAGSA to TJAGLCS, this has been the commanding general if he (or she) is present that day. The most ‘junior’ member of the Corps--- usually a young-in-years and rank MOS 27D paralegal---also participates in the cake cutting. If there is a Judge Advocate Officer Basic Course in session, the junior lieutenant in that course reads a script highlighting the glorious history of our Corps; otherwise, the script is read by the junior Army lawyer in attendance.

This year, the 239th cake-cutting ceremony at TJAGLCS also had a new feature---a slide show presentation of photographs of past Corps birthday celebrations conducted in Charlottesville, with commentary provided by a lieutenant from the 194th Judge Advocate Officer Basic Course.

By the time you read this, the 239th birthday party will have passed into history---with our 240th anniversary on the horizon.

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