

A MESSAGE FOR THE CORPS

Our Corps

The following is the transcript of Lt Gen Rockwell's farewell remarks to the JAG Corps senior leadership and JASOC Class 22B, at The Judge Advocate General's School, 30 March 2022.

Thank you for a great two days as we close out this JAG Corps leadership sync. If you will indulge me, I would like to take this time to close out almost 35 years. I cannot think of a better way to do this than with our new students, our new JAGs, flanking our senior leadership. To do so, I want to talk about 3 things: Our Profession; You; and Our Families.

I. Our Profession(s).

To our new JAGs, whether you know it or not, you joined two professions. It is an interesting combination - being a member of the Profession of Arms and Law at the same time. It has taken me a career to figure out what that means, but, I am guessing you joined because of it and you stayed because of it. When I joined in the Air Force 1987, I came in with a yellow legal pad in hand. I did not have a computer or word processor on my desk until my second assignment. We focused heavily on a Soviet threat in Eastern Europe and we talked a lot about this thing called the "Fulda Gap"; not one of us knew what that term meant, but, we knew if we said it enough we might land an assignment in Europe. The world was very much driven by concepts of Westphalian sovereignty -- an Iron Curtain in Europe. Perhaps not much has changed in many respects, except that that Iron Curtain has been pushed east geographically, and we started thinking harder that maybe our national security isn't just regional; it is global. We started thinking about issues such as integrated deterrence, across all instruments of national power and all branches of our services.

I also knew 35 years ago that I was joining a pretty good outfit, the JAG Corps. But, I did not fully appreciate that I was joining the greatest national security law firm on the planet. Sure, that's easy for me to say, I spent 35 years in it, so of course I'm going to say it's great. But, it is. Pretty bold (over)statement? Just mere platitude? I don't think so. Not when you look at what you are about to do, and have been doing: serving these two professions of arms and the law. Not when you get to look at what the Corps and our members represent.

During my career, I learned from some great teachers, in both professions. Commanders, JAGs, paralegals and civilians across the board. On reflection, one theme stands out: What we do as a JAG Corps has not changed in 35 years. What has changed, and must continue to change, is how we do it.

You must be the catalyst for that change. We will teach you what we do as a Corps, you have to teach us how to do it better and faster. You bring new ideas, discussions and debate to the fight.

Let me take the first part first - the timeless nature of what we do as a JAG Corps. Here is what is timeless in what we do:

- We are charged with being objective when all around you are being subjective.
- We let facts drive our critical analysis under the law. We drive decision making, not narratives.
- We do not argue facts (narratives) that are not evidence or are speculative in nature.
- We defend those who cannot defend themselves.
- We develop the courage to speak up, regardless of how uncomfortable that may be.
- We teach our young JAGs and paralegals to think and analyze issues critically. We do not tell you what to think.

Along this path, we find the truth of the matter that defines the issue, then move to fix it or reconcile it.

We help reconcile competing interests for decision makers that seem sometimes irreconcilable. We do so by following a relatively simple hierarchy of decision factors for the issue, case, or strategic legal framework. As difficult as the case may be, if you follow this hierarchy you will get to the right answer.

- First, what is best for country? What is best for the national security and defense of the country and people we swore to protect and defend?
- Next, what is best for our Air Force? What is best for the Airmen and Guardians executing the mission?
- Then, what is best for our JAG Corps?
- Last, what is best for me or you personally?

You notice we are at the bottom of that. This helps facilitate processing that list. It is fundamentally service before self. Hard to fathom sometimes, but, it is why you joined and why they stayed. Fundamentally serving something bigger than ourselves.

The second part, how we practice national security law has changed dramatically and must continue to change.

- We must critically analyze at a speed we are not necessarily comfortable with. Our competitors are operating at a challenging speed. We must meet that challenge.
- We operationalize the basics of the practice of law: relevance, weight and credibility, at speed. Those basics cut across all of our core functions.
- We advise command on different methods and means of warfare, particularly in space and cyber, that were simply not fathomable three-plus decades ago.
- We embrace artificial intelligence and new processes to get to the truth of any matter sooner.

While the methods and means of war have changed much since I joined in 1987, what states do to jeopardize our national security and defense, and others, have not. This juxtaposition reminds us who we are and what we do best. We are long term strategic thinkers and reminders of history, who look back to precedent to preserve our principles while evolving new methods and means driven by technology and innovation. Which turns to the second area of discussion today, you.

II. You

Eleanor Roosevelt once said: "Good leaders inspire others to have confidence in the leader. Great leaders inspire others to have confidence in themselves." You and the people you lead are great leaders.

A few years ago we started a journey to operationalize the law under a general framework of national security and national defense - whether it is military justice, civil law or operations and international law. We got away from the traditional thinking of aligning law to bureaucracy and organization and moved more towards a domain way of thinking. Similar to how our operators defend and exploit their domains: air, land and sea. We defend our legal domain and, when necessary, explain and exploit it.

Simplifying our practice around the three areas of law recognized in American common law jurisprudence: criminal, civil, and international law allows us to better defend and evolve the law in the context of the national security framework. We are driven by this mission.

Perhaps more importantly, our realignment recognizes that in a global power competition to maintain order and defend the nation, soft targets and software, our law and principles, are critical and must be defended just as much or more as the hard targets and hardware our competitors and adversaries seek to target and exploit.

Back to Eleanor Roosevelt. So what makes you and those you lead great?

Our Civil Law Professionals are perhaps our most important national security law professionals today. They facilitate the acquisition of both hardware and software at speed. They protect command interests in litigation and drive command prerogatives in national security. They reconcile some of the most novel Constitutional law issues we have seen in history. In order to do so, they navigate the integration of the economic instrument of national power with the military instrument - something some people say we can not do. And our people do it incredibly well.

Our Military Justice and Discipline national security law professionals help commands raise and maintain a disciplined force to execute our national defense missions. They reconcile the competing interests recognized in the Preamble of the MCM of what is best for justice, good order and discipline in a unit, and the efficiency and effectiveness of the military establishment. They are innovators who embrace new technology in courts and processes, while still preserving fundamental due processes. They integrate with our military criminal investigators and adjudicative functions early to get to the truth of the matter sooner, for victims of crime and those accused of crimes, as well as for command and mission.

Our International and Operations national security law professionals reconcile and evolve international and operational law rooted in Westphalian principles of sovereignty and boundaries. They reconcile those principles with other instruments of national power in all operational domains, particularly in air, space and cyber, where advancing technology challenges the very bases of these Westphalian principles. They help evolve space as a warfighting domain and a supported Command. Space has been given a clean slate to jettison some of the unnecessary bureaucracy and frameworks that are slowing us down in a global power competition.

While our teammates evolve the law in these legal domains for air and space forces, with critical analysis at speed, the rest of us in leadership and support - from the leaders in this room to the wings, deltas and garrisons - are growing, educating, training, inspecting and building our force. We take the institutional knowledge and build these knowledge management platforms that reflect the brilliance of the JAG Corps. Always remember how special you and our Corps are, because you always strive to make yourself, the Corps, and our air and space forces better.

III. Our Families

Let me finish with "family", the most important of the three topics today. If you will indulge me one last time, let me tell you about mine. They probably look a lot like yours in many respects.

My wife and I have known each other for 45 years - which is pretty good since I am only 46. We joined the Air Force in 1987. We both served for 34-plus years, in partnership. While I focused - sometimes too riveted - on mission, law, or just being plain bullet-headed, she made sure to remind me that everything is about people. She taught me a lot. It is people that matter. She hosted countless events over the years to bring the team together -- Christmas parties, award recognitions, hails and farewells, or just some 'hey, let's get everybody together and go do something. It's easy to just say she loved it, as she is the socialite in this partnership, but she did love it and she did it for a greater purpose. Wherever we were, she brought us and kept us together. Most important, she was always there for our family, and the JAG Corps family, especially when I couldn't be.

I am not sure exactly why military service suited us so well, or why we stayed. I think a lot has to do with from where we came. We come from immigrant families in Southwest Pennsylvania. Our parents and grandparents were proud Americans - Americans of foreign descent. We weren't hyphenated Americans. Our families celebrated our differences, yet, were united by principles. We loved each other's ethnic food, and hated each other's ethnic dances (well, at least one of us hates to dance). Both our parents worked hard and lived by a simple creed, to ensure their kids were better off than them and better than them.

My wife passed this on to our children. Let me be a proud papa right now. We have a doctor and a lawyer in the family. While that sounds impressive, it is so much more than that. Titles and stature mean nothing; it is about purpose and service. Beneath their professional titles, our children have purpose and service. Olivia's and Luc's mom, along with the military professionals and an ethos that they have been surrounded with their whole lives, continued to give them what our parents gave us. Olivia and Luc were taught never to fall in love with problems; rather to find solutions and fix them. Wherever we were assigned, they celebrated what they got to do there. They never asked for special credit or sympathy for any sacrifice they ever made, because they never thought they made a sacrifice. My wife and I have good kids. We are lucky.

Mary Beth and I are lucky because our kids wear their hearts on their sleeves. The beauty of that is we get to see what great hearts they have. We are blessed too that they have given their hearts to good people just like them, who come from parents and grandparents like ours. Mary Beth and I can't wait to see what greater gifts they pass on to their children.

I will close with some lyrics to a song that has been playing in my head my entire career, and playing a bit more loudly these days. A line in the song asks "if you measure the world by the mark that you make, by what you leave behind?" For Mary Beth and I, that is our children. That is how we measure everything. Another line describes the journey to get there as "a sunset on the road, reappearing as we go." That has been our career - every assignment, every new milestone, every new opportunity to work with people like you. The refrain of the song captures the true lesson of this approach to life, that if you do this, you will be "welcomed to the saving grace." My family is my saving grace. I am very blessed to have them. I am very blessed and honored to have served with you.

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