

Lore of the Corps

Our Regimental Cannons

Fred L. Borch
Regimental Historian and Archivist

Every visitor to the Legal Center and School (LCS) must walk past two bronze cannons “guarding” the entrance to the building. These naval weapons have been “members” of our Regiment for more than fifty years, and what follows is a brief historical note on the two cannons and how they came to join our Corps in Charlottesville.



The cannons were officially presented to The Judge Advocate General’s School (TJAGSA) by Rear Admiral Chester C. Ward,¹ the Judge Advocate General of the Navy, in a ceremony on 21 February 1957. Colonel Nathaniel B. Rieger, then serving as Commandant of TJAGSA, accepted the cannons on behalf of the Corps.

The cannon on the left as one faces the building is an English-made weapon. It is a four-pounder with a 3.12 inch bore. It was captured from the Royal Navy during the War of 1812 and taken to Norfolk, Virginia. At the outbreak of the Civil War, the cannon was moved from Norfolk to the

¹ Born in Washington, D.C., in 1907, Rear Admiral Chester C. Ward became a naval aviation cadet in 1927, and after receiving his wings the following year, served in a variety of naval aviation assignments until leaving active duty in 1930. He subsequently graduated from The George Washington University Law School in 1935, and then remained on the faculty, first as an instructor and then as an Assistant Professor of Law. Admiral Ward was still teaching law when he returned to active duty in 1941. During World War II, he performed Navy legal duties in a variety of assignments, including Chief, General Law Division. In that position, then Captain Ward was responsible for all admiralty, taxation, international law, legal assistance, and claims matters for the Navy. Admiral Ward remained on active duty after the war ended, and during the Korean War, served as the top legal officer on the staff of the Commander in Chief, Pacific, and Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet. Admiral Ward took the oath as the Judge Advocate General of the Navy in August 1956. He retired four years later, at the age of fifty-two. THE JAG JOURNAL, Sept.–Oct. 1956, at 3–4.

U.S. Naval Gun Factory, Washington, D.C., so that it would not fall into Confederate hands.



Rear Admiral Chester C. Ward

The cannon on the right as one faces the building is a French bronze gun with a 3.5 inch bore. The name and date, “Frerejean Freres Lyon, 1795,” indicate that it was cast by a foundry in Lyon, France, after the Revolution of 1789—which makes sense, given the inscription “Libertie Egalité” stamped near the muzzle of the piece. It is not known how this gun came into the U.S. Navy’s possession, but it is stamped “Trophy No. 27.”



According to an undated memo in the Regimental Archives, “the cannons are symbolic, first of the traditions of

the Armed Forces which strongly influence the role of the military lawyer, and second of the close coordination between the Armed Forces in the operation of The Judge Advocate General's School."² It seems reasonable to conclude that this language was the justification for the Navy's gift of the cannons to our Regiment.

Only a few hours after the ceremony in 1957, the English cannon was "abducted" by persons unknown. It was discovered three days later on an Albemarle County estate.³ After returning to Army control at Hancock House on the main grounds of the University of Virginia (UVA), this cannon—and its French counterpart—were firmly anchored on concrete pillars. But not firmly enough: during the

Vietnam War in the early 1970s, both cannons were stolen. They were returned a few days later. While the identity of those individuals who took or returned the cannon was never discovered, members of the TJAGSA staff and faculty assumed the culprits were UVA students opposed to U.S. involvement in the war in Southeast Asia.

When TJAGSA moved to its present location on North Grounds in the mid-1970s, the cannons were transported as well—and remain on guard outside the LCS to this day.

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>

² THE JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL'S SCHOOL, HISTORICAL NOTE ON CANNONS (n.d.).

³ THE JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL'S SCHOOL, THE JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL'S SCHOOL, 1951–1961, at 26 (1961).