

Lore of the Corps

The First Female Instructor in International Law and a Pioneer in Judge Advocate Recruiting: Michelle Brown Fladeboe (1948-2016)*

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Michelle B. Fladeboe (né Brown) was the first female instructor in the International Law Division at The Judge Advocate General's School, U.S. Army (TJAGSA). She was also the "face" of the Corps in early efforts to recruit more women to be Army lawyers. This is her story.

Born Michelle Bright Brown in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, on March 10, 1948, she graduated from Peabody Demonstration School in Nashville. Brown then started college at Emory University in Atlanta but transferred to the University of Colorado, from which she graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1972. The following year, Michelle began law school at the University of Georgia. She developed an interest in public international law, and former Secretary of State Dean Rusk, then on the law school faculty, encouraged this interest.¹ Secretary Rusk also supported her efforts to get an advanced degree in the field. As a result, after graduating with honors from Georgia, Brown moved to the United Kingdom, where she completed an LL.M. in International Law at the London School of Economics in 1977.

After returning to the United States, Michelle applied for a direct commission in The Judge Advocate General's Corps,



Captain Michelle Brown, *ABA Journal*, September 1981

U.S. Army. She considered all the services, but was most attracted by the Army because it seemed to have the most opportunities to practice public international law. She also thought that the Army would be a good way to start a career in that field.²

After completing the 85th Judge Advocate Officer Basic Course (JAOBC) in December 1977,³ Captain (CPT) Michelle Brown was assigned to Heidelberg, Germany, where she assumed duties in the Office of the Judge Advocate, Headquarters, U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR) and 7th Army. At the time, with some 300,000 Soldiers stationed in Europe and the Cold War still very much a reality, the senior Army lawyer at USAREUR was Brigadier General Wayne Alley.⁴ There were a variety of international legal issues during this time, and CPT Brown very much enjoyed

working for Alley in the Opinions and Policy Branch of the International Affairs Division.⁵

She considered her time in Heidelberg to have been a "dream job" and was disappointed when the Corps cut short her tour in Germany by a year. But the Army decided that CPT Brown's expertise could be best used in teaching others,

* The author thanks Lieutenant Colonel Jan P. Fladeboe, U.S. Marine Corps (retired) for his help in preparing this Lore of the Corps.

¹ Born in Georgia in 1909, David Dean Rusk graduated from Davidson College (North Carolina) and St. Johns College, Oxford, where he was a Rhodes Scholar. He served in the Army during the Second World War and as Secretary of State during the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations (1961-1969). From 1970 to 1994, Rusk was a Professor of International Law at the University of Georgia Law School. Dean Rusk died in 1994. For more on Rusk's life and career, see DAVID DEAN RUSK, *AS I SAW IT* (1990).

² E-mail from Jan P. Fladeboe to author, Subject: Three Questions (Oct. 12, 2016, 2:58PM) (on file with author).

³ Personnel Data Sheet, Michelle B. Gottlieb, 85th Judge Advocate Officer Basic Course, Oct-Dec 1977.

⁴ After retiring from active duty, Brigadier General Wayne Alley became the Dean of the University of Oklahoma School of Law. He subsequently was nominated and confirmed as a U.S. District Judge for the District of Oklahoma, becoming only the second Army lawyer in history to retire from active duty and then serve as an Article III judge. For more on Alley's remarkable career, see George R. Smawley, *In Pursuit of Justice, A Life of Law and Public Service: United States District Court Judge and Brigadier General (Retired) Wayne E. Alley, U.S. Army, 1952-1954, 1959-1981*, 208 MIL. L. REV. 212 (2011).

⁵ Michelle Bright Brown, Staff and Faculty, 29th Graduate Class Directory, 1980-1981 [hereinafter 29th Graduate Class Directory].

and so Michelle returned to Charlottesville in May 1980 to be an instructor at TJAGSA.⁶



Captain Michelle Brown Gottlieb, 85th JAOBC, TJAGSA, ca. 1977

As she departed Germany, her class work at USAREUR was recognized by the award of the Meritorious Service Medal, a high honor for a first-term captain who ordinarily might expect to receive an Army Commendation Medal.⁷

While not the first female judge advocate on the TJAGSA faculty,⁸ CPT Brown was the first female judge advocate to be a professor (then called an instructor) in the International Law Division. While certainly well-qualified with an LL.M. in international law and practical experience from her time in Heidelberg, Michelle's assignment to the faculty was unusual in that she had less than three years in uniform and had only completed one tour of duty as an Army lawyer. She also had not completed the Graduate Course, the usual prerequisite for joining the TJAGSA faculty.⁹

For the next several years, CPT Brown served in the International Law Division and taught with a variety of more senior officers, including Majors Eugene D. (Gene) Fryer, David (Dave) R. Dowell, and Harold W. (Wayne) Elliott.

In early 1981, she was asked if she would be a part of the Army Judge Advocate General's (JAG) Corps' recruiting

campaign. Captain Brown "was a bit unsure about it, but somehow was convinced to go up to New York City, where the Manhattan-based advertising firm of A. W. Ayer arranged a photo 'shoot' of her in uniform. A.W. Ayer is famous today having originated the Army's phenomenally successful "Be All You Can Be" recruiting slogan, which was "the signature for all Army ads" for twenty years.¹⁰ Unfortunately, the firm's success was overshadowed by its later legal troubles with the Army.¹¹

In any event, the JAG Corps was especially interested in attracting more female attorneys to its ranks, a process that had started ten years earlier with the creation of a Minority



An Army Nurse Corps Recruiting Advertisement, ca. 1975

Lawyer Recruitment Program focusing on African-Americans and women.¹² Michelle Brown was a perfect choice given her background and photogenic face, and a full-page recruiting advertisement identifying her as an "International Lawyer" appeared in a variety of publications, including the American Bar Association Journal in September 1981. While readers today might be surprised by obvious sex-appeal in the ad, it was very similar advertisements used by other Army branches, as shown in the accompanying recruiting photograph for the Army Nurse Corps.

Whether or not the advertisement brought more women (and men) into the Corps will never be known. But Michelle Brown "was a bit uncomfortable about the publicity that her ad received . . . she felt it detracted from her work on the podium" at TJAGSA.¹³ As for the photo shoot itself, Brown

⁶ E-mail from Jan P. Flabeboe, *supra* note 2.

⁷ 29th Graduate Class Directory, *supra* note 5.

⁸ The first woman on the The Judge Advocate General's School, U.S. Army (TJAGSA) faculty was Major Nancy Hunter, who taught criminal law in the early 1970s. Colonel Elizabeth Smith, Jr. had been the first female Army lawyer assigned to TJAGSA, but she had been on the staff in the 1960s.

⁹ Another example of a judge advocate whose expertise led to an early assignment on the faculty was Colonel (retired) David E. Graham. Then Captain (CPT) Graham was selected to stay and teach international law at TJAGSA after graduating from the Judge Advocate Officer Basic Course in 1971.

¹⁰ Tom Evans, *All We Could Be: How an Advertising Campaign Helped Remake the Army*, ON POINT, Jan. 2015, at 6-8.

¹¹ In late 1986, N.W. Ayer's relationship with the Army collapsed when it was suspended (and then debarred) for procurement fraud. Ayer was found to have "engaged in time-card mischarging" between 1979 and 1983, and have conspired with its subcontractors to submit "collusive, rigged, noncompetitive bids." Michael Isikoff, *N.W. Ayer Barred from U.S. Business*, WASH. POST, Nov. 26, 1986, at A1.

¹² In 1971, then CPT Kenneth Gray was asked to direct the inaugural Minority Lawyer Recruitment Program. His mission was to implement and coordinate the recruitment of all minority and women for the Corps. JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL'S CORPS, THE ARMY LAWYER 251 (1975). Gray later served as The Assistant Judge Advocate General of the Army and retired as a major general in 1997.

¹³ 29th Graduate Class Directory, *supra* note 5.

remembered later that she had been “a bit nervous” and was given “a tot of whiskey to relax” before the photographs were taken of her.¹⁴

Captain Brown left active duty after marrying then-Major Jan P. Fladeboe, a U.S. Naval Academy graduate and Marine Corps lawyer whom she met while he was a student at TJAGSA. For several years, she remained in the Army Reserve as a judge advocate, serving with the 63d Army Command in California. She resigned her Reserve commission when her husband was assigned overseas to the Marine Corps Air Station in Iwakuni, Japan.



Captain Michelle Brown, TJAGSA Faculty, ca. 1981

After Lieutenant Colonel Fladeboe retired from active duty and joined the U.S. State Department, Michelle and their three children joined him at State Department postings in Moscow and Vienna.

After returning to American soil, the Fladeboes settled in Lake Monticello, Virginia. Michelle resumed her connections with the JAG Corps by sponsoring Egyptian student officers attending either the Basic or Graduate Courses at The Judge Advocate General’s Legal Center and School. She was especially interested in Egypt and had visited the country twice. She was working on a book about the people and the country when she was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia. Michelle B. Fladeboe died on February 2, 2016. She was 67 years old.¹⁵

She is survived by her husband, Jan Fladeboe, and two sons and one daughter. Michelle will not be forgotten by those who were in the Corps in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and this Lore of the Corps will bring her achievements—and her place in our history—to the attention of a new generation of judge advocates.

More historical information can be found at

The Judge Advocate General's Corps
Regimental History Website
<https://www.jagcnet.army.mil/8525736A005BE1BE>

*Dedicated to the brave men and women who have
served our Corps with honor, dedication, and distinction.*

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ E-mail from Jan P. Fladeboe, *supra* note 2.