

**From West Point to Michigan to China:  
The Remarkable Career of Edward Hamilton Young (1897–1987)**

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Prior to World War II, there was no such thing as military legal education, and uniformed lawyers serving in The Judge Advocate General's Department (JAGD) learned "on the job." The rapid expansion of the Army after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor—from 1.6 million Soldiers to a force of 8 million men and women—caused a complementary explosion in the number of Army judge advocates, and a realization that "on the job" legal education was too slow and inconsistent for wartime. As a result, Major General (MG) Myron C. Cramer, who had assumed duties as The Judge Advocate General (TJAG) just one week prior to the Pearl Harbor Attack, established a Judge Advocate General's School, U.S. Army (TJAGSA) at the University of Michigan. Cramer also selected Colonel (COL) Edward "Ham" Young, who had previously taught law at West Point, to take charge of this first-ever school for the education and training of Army lawyers. This is the story of Young's remarkable three year tour as the first TJAGSA Commandant, and his equally remarkable follow-on assignment as the theater judge advocate for all U.S. military personnel in China.

Born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on 16 June 1897, Edward Hamilton "Ham" Young spent a few years in San Francisco before moving with his parents to Washington, D.C. After attending elementary and high school in D.C., Young wanted to follow his older brother, Cassin, to the U.S. Naval Academy (USNA).<sup>1</sup> He applied for an

appointment as a midshipman but was rejected "because he had flat feet and wouldn't be able to stand watch."<sup>2</sup> As a result, Ham Young applied to the U.S. Military Academy (USMA) at West Point. Apparently the Navy's view on Young's feet was not dispositive, since he was admitted as a cadet in June 1917. When he was later commissioned as an infantry second lieutenant, Young's naval officer brothers (a younger sibling also was a USNA graduate) teased him about being unfit to stand watch on a ship's bridge but nonetheless sufficiently healthy to go to the field.<sup>3</sup>

Upon graduating from West Point, then-Second Lieutenant Young deployed to Europe, where "he served as an observer of Belgian, French and Italian battle fronts and visited the Army of Occupation in Germany."<sup>4</sup> When he returned from Europe, Young completed the Basic Infantry Officers Course at Fort Benning, Georgia, and then served in a variety of company, battalion, and regimental assignments in the Philippines and the United States.

In 1929, Young was given command of the Army War College Detachment in Washington, D.C., with the additional duty of White House aide. After serving in the White House in both Calvin Coolidge's and Herbert Hoover's administrations, Young was sent to Governors Island, New York, where he was the aide-de-camp to MG Dennis E. Nolan, the commanding general of First Army.

In 1933, the same year that he married Ellen Nolan, his boss's daughter, Young was sent to New York University School of Law, where he took a course in law and then went to West Point to be an instructor. As Brigadier General (Retired) Patrick Finnegan explains in his study of USMA's legal education, not all Law Department instructors were lawyers. On the contrary, some were line officers like Young. But, to "ensure high standards of teaching, the Law Department began sending its officers who were not lawyers to receive training at law schools."<sup>5</sup> This explains why

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<sup>1</sup> Cassin Young had a distinguished career as a naval officer and was awarded the Medal of Honor for his "distinguished conduct in action, outstanding heroism and utter disregard of his own safety" while commanding officer of the U.S. Ship (USS) *Vestal* at Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941. His citation reads, in part:

Commander Young proceeded to the bridge and later took personal command of the three-inch antiaircraft gun. When blown overboard by the blast of the forward magazine explosion of the USS *Arizona*, to which the USS *Vestal* was moored, he swam back to his ship. The entire forward part of the USS *Arizona* was a blazing inferno with oil afire on the water between the two ships; as a result of several bomb hits, the USS *Vestal* was afire in several places, was settling and taking on a list. Despite severe enemy bombing and strafing at the time, and his shocking experience of having been blown overboard, Commander Young, with extreme coolness and calmness, moved his ship to an anchorage distant from the USS *Arizona*, and subsequently beached the USS *Vestal* upon determining that such action was required to save his ship. Although he survived the Japanese attack on Hawaii, Cassin Young was killed in action at Guadalcanal less than a year later, in November 1942.

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*Medal of Honor Recipients, World War II (T–Z)*, Ctr. of Military History, available at <http://www.history.army.mil/html/moh/wwII-t-z.html> (last visited Aug. 14, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> M.S. Young, *Edward Hamilton Young*, ASSEMBLY, Sept. 1990, at 154.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> Patrick Finnegan, *The Study of Law as a Foundation of Leadership and Command: The History of Law Instruction at the United States Military Academy at West Point*, 181 MIL. L. REV. 112, 120 (2004).

Young took a course of law in New York City before joining the Law Department faculty. While at West Point, Young showed a keen interest in legal research and writing, and authored two textbooks on constitutional law. His *Constitutional Powers and Limitations* was later adopted as “the official text on constitutional law at the Academy.”<sup>6</sup>

In 1936, Young was detailed to the JAGD and sent to New York to complete his law degree. After graduating in 1938, and passing the New York bar, Young returned to West Point’s Law Department to resume his duties as an Assistant Professor of Law. At the conclusion of his USMA tour of duty, now–Lieutenant Colonel Young was reassigned to Washington, D.C., where he joined The Judge Advocate General’s Office as the deputy chief of the Military Affairs Division.<sup>7</sup> He was promoted to COL in early 1942.

With the entry of the United States into World War II, and the expansion of the JAGD, the Army approved the opening of TJAGSA on the campus of the National University School of Law located on Thirteenth Street, Washington, D.C. Given COL Young’s recent teaching experiences at West Point, and his presence in Washington, it made perfect sense for MG Cramer<sup>8</sup> to select Young to be the first commandant of the school.

While TJAGSA opened on 9 February 1942, MG Cramer and others soon realized that D.C. “was not an ideal wartime location” for “basic, specialized and refresher training for active duty military personnel. . . .”<sup>9</sup> The chief problem was insufficient classroom space and, as a result, TJAGSA moved to the University of Michigan’s “Law Quadrangle” in September 1942. Colonel Young went with it and now was consumed with setting up a “regular program of instruction . . . to train attorneys in all areas of military law and to introduce those who were coming directly from their civilian professions to military life.”<sup>10</sup> Since no school for Army lawyers had existed previously, Young had no standards or precedents to guide him. Yet he successfully planned, organized and administered a comprehensive course of instruction. Between February 1942, when COL Young arrived in Ann Arbor, and December 1944, when he turned over the school to a new commandant, Young and his faculty trained more than 1,700 officers and officer candidates to be judge advocates. As this constituted two-

thirds of the active duty strength of the JAGD,<sup>11</sup> it was a remarkable achievement by any measure and explains, at least in part, why the news media referred to TJAGSA as the “Lawyers’ West Point.”<sup>12</sup> The legal profession also recognized COL Young’s contribution to the law, as evidenced by his being awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws by the University of Miami (Coral Gables, Florida).<sup>13</sup>

While serving as the commandant, COL Young was also appointed Professor of Military Science and Tactics at the University of Michigan by the commanding general of the Sixth Service Command. As a result, Young “enjoyed the distinction of being one of the few officers in the JAGD to exercise functions of command over troops other than those of the Department.”<sup>14</sup>

In December 1944, COL Young left Michigan for Nanking, China, where he assumed duties as the theater judge advocate for the U.S. Forces in China and legal advisor to the U.S. Embassy. As the United States and its Pacific allies began investigating Japanese civilian and military personnel for war crimes, COL Young also became the legal advisor to the Far East United Nations War Crimes Commissions. Young remained in China until November 1947, when he returned to the United States. His tenure in China had been unique in the history of the Corps, as no other judge advocate had served as theater judge advocate before Young—and no one followed him in the assignment. When he left China, COL Young made history again as the only Army lawyer to be awarded three Chinese decorations: the Special Collar of the Order of Brilliant Star, Special Breast Order of the Cloud and Banner, and Special Breast Order of Pao Ting.<sup>15</sup> Young’s report on his experiences in China remains the only official record of Army legal operations in the Far East during this turbulent period in history.<sup>16</sup>

Assigned to the Office of The Judge Advocate General in the Pentagon, Young served first as Chief, War Crimes Branch, Civil Affairs Division. Slightly more than a year later, in January 1949, Young left the Pentagon for Fort Meade, Maryland, where he was assigned as the Staff Judge Advocate (SJA), Second Army. He picked up an additional

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<sup>6</sup> Young, *supra* note 2, at 154.

<sup>7</sup> Captain George P. Forbes, Jr., *The Judge Advocate General’s School*, JUDGE ADVOCATE J., Mar. 1945, at 48.

<sup>8</sup> JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL’S CORPS, U.S. ARMY, THE ARMY LAWYER: A HISTORY OF THE JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL’S CORPS, 1775–1975, at 161 (1975) (providing more information on Major General Myron C. Cramer).

<sup>9</sup> *Id.* at 186.

<sup>10</sup> *Id.* at 187.

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<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

<sup>12</sup> Forbes, *supra* note 7, at 48.

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*

<sup>15</sup> Young, *supra* note 2, at 155.

<sup>16</sup> EDWARD H. YOUNG, REPORT OF THE JUDGE ADVOCATE, UNITED STATES FORCES, CHINA THEATER, UNITED STATES ARMY FORCES CHINA, NANKING HEADQUARTERS COMMAND, AND ARMY ADVISORY GROUP CHINA, 1 JANUARY 1945 TO 10 JUNE 1947 (1948).

duty the following year, when TJAGSA was re-activated at Fort Myer, Virginia. TJAGSA had closed its doors in Ann Arbor in 1946, but with the outbreak of the Korean War, MG Ernest M. “Mike” Brannon, then serving as TJAG, decided to re-start the school and asked COL Young to serve as its commandant.

Colonel Ham Young retired as Second Army SJA in August 1954. Given that he had graduated from USMA in November 1918, he had served more than thirty-five years on active duty—an unusual length of service for an officer who did not reach flag rank.

In retirement, Young served as the secretary to the Board of Commissioners, U.S. Soldiers Home, Washington, D.C. After leaving this position in 1965 and enjoying his

retirement in Virginia until 1972, COL Young and his wife moved to Vero Beach, Florida. He died at his home there in November 1987 and is interred in Arlington National Cemetery.<sup>17</sup> Today, Young has not been forgotten and his vision of an educational curriculum that transforms civilian attorneys into officers and military lawyers continues at The Judge Advocate General’s Legal Center and School in Charlottesville, Virginia.

*More historical information can be found at*

The Judge Advocate General’s Corps  
Regimental History Website

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<https://www.jagcnet.army.mil/8525736A005BE1BE>

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<sup>17</sup> Young, *supra* note 2, at 155.