

# Military attorneys give home-front help

## Through JAG, lawyers gain a new appreciation for the justice system

By CLAUDE SOLNIK

While many attorneys were embroiled in courtroom battles, Jason Trigger Esq., was dodging gunfire, running from a line of trees to a battered building where he helped clear rooms and take prisoners.

Suddenly, Trigger felt a hand on his shoulder: A sergeant told him he was dead – for the moment.

Trigger was in military training this summer at Fort Benning in Charlottesville, Ga., required for attorneys who want to serve in the Judge Advocate General corps.

"Everything's going on around you. You hear the blank fire and the sound of the boots running around you," Trigger said. "You think, 'It's that fast.'"

After practicing law for four years, the 28-year-old Farrell Fritz attorney in January joined the Army Reserves, spending three months at JAG headquarters at the University of Virginia and three in infantry training.

Trigger returned to Uniondale-based Farrell Fritz a few weeks ago to work as an attorney year-round, spending two weeks annually providing legal help as a JAG attorney in the Reserves.

The JAG is even older than our nation. General George Washington founded it on July 29th, 1775, creating what is now the equivalent of one of the nation's largest law firms with more than 3,400 full- and part-time attorneys, according to the U.S. Army.

Although many JAG attorneys work in Iraq, thousands of others in the Reserves, like Trigger, fulfill their commitment by helping troops and families

navigate the legal system at home. About 1,500 serve on active duty and more than 3,000 are in the Reserves.

JAG attorneys on the home front help soldiers prepare paperwork including wills and powers-of-attorney, and help them get their finances in order on their way to and from war zones through the military's Soldier Readiness Program. JAG attorneys also handle court-martials, contracts, family law, trust and estate law, charges of disobeying orders and dereliction of duty, and even criminal cases such as domestic violence, drug sale, murder and robbery.

In addition to his job at Farrell Fritz, Trigger is a 1st Lieutenant in the 4th Legal Support Organization, assisting soldiers and families at Fort Totten one weekend each month.

"Some people were a little shocked. Some of them thought I was crazy, especially in the current political climate," Trigger said. "It was something I had wanted to do in law school ... it's the notion of service, a sense of giving back to the country."

Co-Managing Partner Mark S. Mulholland of Uniondale-based Ruskin, Moscou Faltishek, a JAG attorney from 1986 to 1989, also served on the home front.

"It's a very profound experience to be in the service," Mulholland said. "It makes you respectful of a lot – things I



Jason Trigger is a lawyer with Farrell Fritz and JAG attorney with the U.S. Army Reserves.

think people don't understand who were never in the military."

Mulholland spent four years as a JAG attorney, handling cases involving drugs, espionage, murder, attempted murder and white-collar crime, even a case involving soldiers charged with conspiring to steal money from the U.S. Treasury.

"The caseload was heavy," he said. "I certainly was viewed as a professional. I was a full-time active duty officer."

Mulholland, who also trained to jump from airplanes and reached the rank of captain, said soldiers follow instructions assiduously in court marshals.

"The military justice system is, in my view, one of the fairest justice systems in the world," he said. "I've not seen a more fair system."