



James A. Georges Law Star with a Bronze Star

By Regan Morris

Imagine you're busy juggling caseloads in a bustling law practice. The phone rings. You've got three days to report for active duty and will likely be sent to Iraq. James A. Georges, a White and Williams associate, got that call. He returned to work at the firm March 28 after 18 months on active duty, including a year commanding a Military Police unit in Iraq.

"It's a shocking experience when they call you," he told LawCrossing. "When you get that phone call that says you have three days to report someplace because you're getting ready to be sent away for a year and a half, you know, it is a shocking thing. So you have to be committed to it."

Georges, 45, has been committed to the military since his undergraduate days at Drexel University. A lieutenant colonel in the reserves, Georges was in Iraq commanding a unit of MPs responsible for Iran's Mujahedeen Khalq, or MEK, Iran's exiled opposition, which is considered a terrorist group by the United States and the European Union.

The Americans have disarmed the MEK, who have been fighting to overthrow the ruling clerics of neighboring Iran for two decades. The MEK lost a friend in Saddam Hussein, but they have stayed in Iraq, afraid to go back to Iran. No one—including the American soldiers now guarding them—knows what to do with them. Georges did not want to discuss specifics of his work with the MEK or speculate on what might happen to them.

Georges, however, did say that he worked with many attorneys in Iraq and that legal training comes in very handy for MPs. Because of the Abu Ghraib scandal, Georges said that officials were pleased to have attorneys in command positions.

"I think it helps to have lawyers because lawyers can grasp complex situations; they can make sure the right thing is done," he said. "You have that all the time when you counsel clients. It definitely gave me an understanding of all the complex rules that they have. I mean there's a lot of international laws, with the Geneva Convention and other treaties."

Georges said military training has helped his civilian career and vice versa. He started with the military as an ROTC scholarship student. The military paid for his education in exchange for four years of service. During that service, Georges earned an MBA in management from Golden Gate University in 1986 while saving money for law school. After his four years of service, Georges attended Temple University School of Law and received his J.D., *cum laude*, in 1990.

Georges, who specializes in creditors' rights, said military skills are invaluable to a lawyer.

"My military career has helped my civilian career, and my civilian career has helped my military career. The negotiation and mediation skills—it's the same type of thing," he said. "I actually saw no difference between what I do here and day to day there, except for the fact that you have a whole bunch of guns and bulletproof vests."

The guns are something you think about every day, he said. But apparently, negotiating with alleged terrorists and angry creditors takes many of the same skills.

Georges teaches business law at the Art Institute of Philadelphia, teaching the students how to protect the intellectual property they create. He has also taught legal ethics.

Georges—who has been admitted to military courts through a *pro bono* case, but has never worked as an official military attorney—said an advantage of being in the military for attorneys and everyone is the amount of responsibility. You don't have to wait 20 years, cutting your teeth, before you're in charge.

"I think you get a lot of experience and responsibility that you don't necessarily get in private practice," he said. "A lot of those first- and second-year attorneys are doing prosecutions. We had attorneys that were probably in their second or third year that were undertaking prosecutions in Iraq. You see that happen everywhere. I had young lawyers that worked for me providing me with advice."

The military, he said, will give you plenty of responsibility and experience. Georges was only duty bound for four years in exchange for his education, but says he has continued to serve because of a sense of honor and for the opportunities. He served part of his first active duty stint in Korea during the 1980s.

Reserves must be prepared and willing to go, he said, no matter what their family situations. Georges left behind his wife, also an attorney, and two children, now 7 1/2 and 3.

"It was very difficult for them," he said. "That part—you have to understand that maybe five, ten years ago, people in the reserves didn't think they were going to get called for any long terms of service. And now, you know, the periods of service, depending on what branch you're in—the Army or the Navy—it's a year and a half and up to two years."

But people shouldn't join the reserves if they're not prepared to serve, he said.

"People have to follow their dreams and do what they want," he said. "It can be a very satisfying career. You just have to be ready for where it's going to take you. Because it can take you anywhere in the world, and if you make the commitment, you've got to be ready to fulfill it."