Tributes to Professor John F. Murphy

A TRIBUTE IN HONOR OF PROFESSOR JOHN MURPHY

I have had many wonderful teachers, mentors, and friends in my life—a crusty old First Sergeant, three officers who served as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, a Latin teacher who spent most of our classroom time together teaching art appreciation, old experienced Washington legal hands, and many, many others in and out of uniform—but no one has had a more profound impact on my life as an attorney than Professor John Murphy.

I first met John many years ago (I hate to think just how many) when, as a brash young Army captain fresh from an assignment with a nuclear weapons unit in Europe, I began my new military assignment as a law student at the Kansas School of Law. My experiences with the military justice system as an Army unit commander had sparked my interest in the law, and I was lucky enough to have been selected in the first year of a new program to send young serving line officers to law school, followed by our transfer to the Judge Advocate General’s Corps for service as military lawyers.

I did not have a particular focus on international law when I started; I thoroughly enjoyed the courses in criminal law, torts, contract law, and other subjects, and greatly admired the professors who taught those courses. Then I took my first course in public international law from John. His knowledge of and—more importantly—his deep understanding of international law and its historical roots were impressive. But it was his profound reverence for the role of the law in guiding the relations among nations and in the resolution of international disputes by means other than war (for which all soldiers should be grateful), his inspiring gifts as a teacher, and his unfailing good humor despite all provocations that have so greatly influenced my thinking and my personal and professional life.

Many years later I served as Deputy Legal and Legislative Counsel to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the first Gulf War and was called upon from time to time to give advice on a law of war or other international legal issue (often in a matter of minutes, with no time for research). More than once I asked myself, how would John Murphy answer that question? and gave the answer I thought John would have given. My work back in the 1970s as John’s research assistant in the area of the legal aspects of international terrorism shaped and continues to shape my views and advice on that complex topic—sadly a topic with as much, or even more, relevance today than it had all those years ago.

John has had many—surely thousands—of students in his long and distinguished career, and his prolific and profound scholarship and writ-
ings have shaped the views of many more thousands of students, academ-
ics, and practicing international lawyers in and out of government. I, like
so many others, deeply respect and admire him for his many scholarly
accomplishments. But, as I suspect is the case with most who have had the
great fortune to know John, I treasure most of all the honor of being able
to call him my friend.

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