

Dept. of Military Affairs: Newly minted circuit court judge and Citizen Soldier serves his state and nation as both a judge and Guardsman

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WAUKESHA, Wis. — Waukesha County's newest circuit court judge has a long history of public service as a Citizen Soldier in the Wisconsin National Guard.

Maj. Jack Melvin, senior defense counsel with the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 505th Trial Defense Team, swore in as the newest judge in Waukesha County Circuit Court, branch five during an August 7 judicial investiture ceremony.

Melvin, who has three deployments and nearly four years-worth of time mobilized to active duty during his 15 year career in the Wisconsin Army National Guard, brings a wealth of experience from his military career to his new position on the bench.

He mobilized for an 18-month deployment to Egypt from June 2008 to December 2009 when he was the only attorney at the U.S. embassy in Cairo. He deployed again with a military engagement team to Jordan in 2014 on a mission that morphed into an anti-Daesh mission, and then again to Iraq in 2016 as part of the 101st Airborne Division Multi-Component Unit – a hybrid division headquarters made up of a Wisconsin National Guard Soldiers and active component Soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division.

Born in La Crosse, Wisconsin, Melvin moved to Sparta, Wisconsin, before moving at age 7 to Brodhead, Wisconsin. The Melvin family has a long lineage of military

service. Spending his early days in Sparta, he became fascinated with the military equipment he spotted heading to nearby Fort McCoy. His father and uncle both served in the Army. His uncles on his mother's side all served in the Air Force, and most of his cousins served in the Navy.

He credits his experiences in the Guard with preparing him to assume his new role.

"The Guard has set me up to be a successful judge in many different ways," he said, noting that the leadership skills he's developed from the Army will serve him well as he manages a courtroom and oversees the team and staff that supports the court's daily functions and ensure the court runs efficiently.

"Just being a leader in the Guard and being a leader in the Army has really helped me prepare for this," he said. "Number two - being a really good team player. Here in Waukesha we have 12 judges, and the other judges really do make me feel like I'm part of their team. So we help each other. We lift each other up. We mentor each other - all that kind of stuff, and I think without the Guard experience I might have been a little bit leery of that."

Melvin also said that one of the greatest parts of serving in the Guard as a judge advocate is that he's been exposed to so many types of law ranging from fiscal and administrative law, interpretation of Department of Defense directives, National Guard Bureau directives, rule-making processes, environmental law, family law, and criminal defense. He estimated that as a judge advocate in the Guard that he's prepared more than 1,000 wills for Soldiers.

As the current senior defense counsel for the Wisconsin Guard's Trial Defense Team, Melvin helps defend Soldiers in disciplinary matters.

At other points in his career, he's also served as a prosecutor in military court-martial proceedings.

"It's really kind of set me up," he said of the vast experience he's gained in so many diverse aspects of military law. "Because there's no lawyer out there who's done every type of law unless you're maybe a Guardsman."

Melvin originally joined the Marine Corps while in college at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, but an injury during officer candidate school derailed those plans. Then while at law school at Marquette University, he had a chance discussion

with the Wisconsin National Guard's State Judge Advocate, and he became a Judge Advocate General Corps officer in the Wisconsin National Guard. He commissioned in December 2004.

"The thing that's been great about the Guard is it's allowed me to serve in the military while having a regular life," he said. "I'm able to be what I am now – a judge – but prior to that an attorney in private practice and not having to move every few years and actually put down roots."

It was early in his legal career that he began setting his sights on becoming a judge. Like any Citizen Soldier, Melvin has had to lean on a supportive and understanding family and employers to succeed in both his professional and military careers, and he knows he'll have to strike a balance between his military commitments and those of the court in his new role going forward.

"Thankfully I've had some employers who have been really supportive, so it's been pretty easy to make the time to do the stuff that the Guard needed" he said. "So I was really able to balance the two because my employers afforded me the time to do both, so as Guard demands would increase or schooling was necessary, they'd let me take care of that."

Going forward he believes that managing his new role as a judge and continuing his service in the Guard are complementary. The Guard, he said, has opened so many avenues and given him so many different experiences that ultimately helped prepare him to become a judge. Likewise, he believes his role as a judge will make him a better JAG officer, because as a judge he will have to make hard decisions.

Likewise, his family has supported his dual life in the Guard and his professional career.

"Unfortunately my wife has had a lot of practice," Melvin said. "As you've heard, I've spent nearly four years on active duty. The saying is that the spouse has the hardest job in the Army, and it's true. When I've been deployed, I've had one thing to worry about – doing my job. When I'm gone, my wife has had to raise two girls alone, done all these things mentioned during the campaign while having had the issue of worrying about some attack on Soldiers in cities she knows I'm based, wondering day to day what dangers I've been exposed to and hoping I come home."

In addition to all that, his wife was simultaneously working full-time at the executive

level for a major employer in the area.

His daughter, Ava Melvin, said her father has always been drawn to service. She was three months old when he commissioned as an officer in the Wisconsin Army National Guard. When she was three years old, and her sister only 15 months old, Melvin left on his first deployment – an 18-month tour overseas.

“He cares about his country, his state, and his community,” she said.

Melvin began his tenure as a judge Aug. 1.