



(From left to right) Maj. Steve Warburton, then-MAJ Chris Chatelain, Maj. James Trescothic-Martin, and Capt. Kathleen Brook attend the British Army Legal Services 75th Anniversary Dinner in London, England. (Photo courtesy of author)

# What's It Like?

## Robo Gen<sup>1</sup> from a Legal Exchange Officer in the United Kingdom

By Lieutenant Colonel Christopher M. Chatelain

The U.S. Army Judge Advocate General's (JAG) Corps has more than 9,700 active duty, Reserve, National Guard, and civilian attorneys, legal administrators, and paralegals.<sup>2</sup> Of this population, only four serve as legal exchange officers, with three of these positions created in the past five years.<sup>3</sup> Two of those exchange positions help maintain the "special relationship"<sup>4</sup> between the United States and the United Kingdom (U.K.). Not surprisingly, the JAG Corps's small but growing prioritization of exchange officers comes at a time when the Department of Defense placed increased

importance on interoperability with allies and partners.<sup>5</sup> In an era of heightened geopolitical competition between major powers, adversary exploitation of rapidly evolving domains and technologies, and instability from transboundary challenges,<sup>6</sup> unity of effort between allies and partners has never been so complex or important for U.S. national security interests. This article seeks to demystify legal exchange officer positions—explaining how and why the Military Personnel Exchange Program (MPEP) works, highlighting how the JAG Corps leverages legal exchange officers,

and then illustrating how these efforts translate into legal interoperability by way of example with the British Army Legal Services (ALS).

U.S. law and policy authorize and govern U.S. exchange officer positions. Exchange officers typically serve as part of a reciprocal, one-for-one exchange of U.S. and partner-nation army personnel.<sup>7</sup> Section 311 of Title 10 of the U.S. Code creates The Defense Personnel Exchange Program (DPEP) as a security cooperation program permitting mutual exchange of defense personnel.<sup>8</sup> Based on this authorization, the Secretary of Defense delegated authority to administer the MPEP, a component of DPEP, to the Service secretaries via Department of Defense Directive 5230.20.<sup>9</sup> Based on this delegation, the U.S. Army governs its contribution to the MPEP through Army Regulation 614-10.<sup>10</sup>

The MPEP has three primary purposes to help achieve national security cooperation goals and combatant commanders' theatre campaign plans. First, the MPEP strengthens alliances and coalitions by building partner capacity and maintaining or enhancing friendly relationships.<sup>11</sup> Second, the MPEP increases U.S. and partner-nation cooperation by integrating U.S. and partner-nation personnel.<sup>12</sup> Third, the program prepares U.S. officers and noncommissioned officers for future assignments in support of multinational operations.<sup>13</sup>

Many stakeholders have responsibilities related to executing the MPEP. The deputy chief of staff (DCS), G-3/5/7 has general staff responsibility for the Army MPEP.<sup>14</sup> The Army Service Component Commands (ASCCs) develop, plan, and integrate Army exchange programs that support their combatant commanders' theatre campaign plan.<sup>15</sup> Through the ASCCs, the DCS, G-3/5/7 serves as the lead agent for negotiating MPEP memoranda of agreement (MOAs) with partner nations.<sup>16</sup>

Once the DCS, G3/5/7 establishes



Members of the 3rd United Kingdom Legal Branch (wearing 1st Cavalry Division baseball hats) pose with members of the 1st Cavalry Division Office of the Staff Judge Advocate after Exercise WARFIGHTER 23.4 at Fort Cavazos, Texas. (Photo courtesy of author)

a country program, U.S. Army Human Resources Command (HRC) selects and assigns U.S. Army personnel for the MPEP positions.<sup>17</sup> Positions are nominative, and HRC must ensure that MPEP nominees satisfy the selection criteria outlined in the exchange program's corresponding MOAs.<sup>18</sup> Once HRC identifies nominees, the ASCCs forward their information to the partner/host nation for approval or disapproval.<sup>19</sup> For Army legal exchange officers, the Talent Management Office performs these duties for HRC.<sup>20</sup> Simultaneously, partner nations' military attachés submit their Army exchange personnel nominees to the recipient Department of the Army (DA) command and through the DCS, G-2 for approval.<sup>21</sup> Once nations agree upon specific exchange personnel, ASCCs have overall responsibility for MPEP coordination and support activities within their combatant commands' area of responsibility.<sup>22</sup>

Recognizing the importance of allies and partners, the JAG Corps leverages the MPEP to enhance legal interoperability. The JAG Corps Strategy highlights that "[a]lliances and partnerships are among the greatest sources of our military strength."<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, the JAG Corps contributes to maintaining and expanding the Army's network of allies and partners through the interrelated concepts of security cooperation and legal interoperability.<sup>24</sup> With exchanges being one of the JAG Corps's

five legal interoperability lines of effort (LOEs),<sup>25</sup> legal exchange officers constitute a critical component of the JAG Corps's contribution to multinational interoperability.

The JAG Corps defines legal interoperability as "[t]he achievement of shared understanding of respective authorities, permissions, restrictions, obligations, and interpretations of international and domestic law and policy that enables the Combined Force to act together lawfully, coherently, effectively, and efficiently, to achieve tactical, operational, and strategic objectives."<sup>26</sup> Practically, this means that "[w]e must be able to successfully support the integration of allied and partner capabilities into a single, lawfully-conducted, unified operation across each and every warfighting function."<sup>27</sup>

With ASCCs responsible for MPEP programs within their theaters, the ASCCs' Offices of the Staff Judge Advocate ensure that legal exchange officers' security cooperation and legal interoperability activities align with their theater's LOEs. For example, the U.S. Army Europe and Africa (USAREUR-AF) Office of the Judge Advocate (OJA) nests its legal exchange officers' activities within USAREUR-AF's LOEs. One of those LOEs is to increase the scale, capability, and interoperability of allies and partners through activities such as multinational exercises, multinational

training and education, and senior leader engagements.<sup>28</sup>

These laws, policies, and procedures result in one of the most impactful, challenging, interesting, and rewarding jobs that the JAG Corps has to offer. By way of illustration, MPEP Position UK-69 establishes an exchange of national security law attorneys between 3rd (U.K.) Division, the U.K.'s warfighting division, and III Armored Corps.<sup>29</sup> The corresponding position descriptions for the U.S. and British lawyers focus on participation in partner country exercises and enhancing legal interoperability through working-level defense engagement.<sup>30</sup>

At the individual level, the judge advocate (JA) exchange officer principally works for the British Army. An MPEP officer should not be confused with a liaison officer. The ALS only has 109 lawyers,<sup>31</sup> but they exchange one British attorney to utilize a U.S. Army JA in their premier warfighting division. As such, the JA must pull their weight in the day-to-day workload expected of a British Army lawyer. This includes deploying with British Army division and brigade headquarters on exercises, advising commanders on British military disciplinary and administrative law, attending and leading unit training, attending routine divisional staff meetings, maintaining marksmanship on an assigned SA-80 assault rifle (comparable to the M4 carbine), participating in unit physical

fitness sessions and British Army physical fitness tests, and all the other tasks inherent with being part of a British divisional staff officer and British Army soldier.

Being a JA legal exchange officer, however, involves more than being a legal advisor for a foreign military. Interoperabil-

family developed roots in the U.K. that will persist long after my tour.

Beyond these aims, a legal exchange officer must leverage their connection with the ASCC, and U.S. Army writ large, to create opportunities that enhance the procedural and human domains of interop-

Likewise, with one foot in both armies, an MPEP officer is uniquely situated to unite key leaders and subject matter experts from allied nations. For example, I helped bring together Mr. Fred Borch, our recently retired JAG Corps regimental historian, field grade officers from USAREUR-AF, and about a quarter of the ALS's officers, including the ALS head of operational law, during an ALS-led staff ride in Germany to study the International Military Tribunal and subsequent Nuremberg trials occurring immediately after World War II. This event aided JAG Corps and ALS officers in building personal relationships. It also provided the ALS officers with unique insight into America's past contribution to international tribunals and contemporary lessons learned from the U.S. experience with the Guantanamo Military Commissions.

Although a small contingent, legal exchange officers significantly increase legal interoperability with partners and allies at a time when national security requires transformative cooperation.<sup>34</sup> To overcome the most complex and grave threats to rules-based international order in recent history, like-minded allies and partners are working collectively to address our shared challenges.<sup>35</sup> This strategic goal cannot be accomplished without legal interoperability, which is the purpose of the modest cohort of legal exchange officers. The MPEP enables this cohort, thereby providing the JAG Corps with a vital tool to enhance multinational legal interoperability in a direct and lasting way. Thus, to our partners and allies working together for a safer world, the senior JAs at the Office of The Judge Advocate General and ASCCs who support the MPEP program, and the U.S., U.K., Australian, and Polish legal exchange officers of past, present, and future—THANK YOU, CHEERS, TA, and DZIĘKI! **TAL**

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*LTC Chatelain is the Deputy Chief of Administrative Law for the Office of the Staff Judge Advocate, U.S. Army Pacific, at Fort Shafter, Hawaii. He previously served as the U.S. Legal Exchange Officer to the 3rd (UK) Division at Bulford Camp, United Kingdom.*

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**In an era of heightened geopolitical competition between major powers, adversary exploitation of rapidly evolving domains and technologies, and instability from transboundary challenges, unity of effort between allies and partners has never been so complex or important for U.S. national security interests.**

ity has three essential elements—technical, procedural, and human.<sup>32</sup> Fundamentally, the human domain of interoperability involves cultivating lasting personal and professional relationships. Shared hardship from field exercises, arduous professional military education, and strenuous physical training create enduring trust and confidence within a team. Sharing a proverbial and literal foxhole inherently brings people together. I spent approximately a quarter of my two-year assignment on various field exercises, often living in crew shelters and Warrior armored vehicles with British soldiers of all ranks and backgrounds. I attended the British Army Winter Mountain Foundations Course, climbing the frigid Scottish Highlands with fellow members of the 3rd (U.K.) Division staff. And, I sweated alongside the division staff during grueling physical fitness sessions. In doing so, I developed lifelong friendships based on respect, trust, and confidence.

Moreover, maintaining the type of enduring relationships envisioned by the MPEP involves more than having a shared military experience. The MOU that governs the U.S.-U.K. program contains candidate selection criteria aimed at rooting military families in their host nation.<sup>33</sup> As such, my family attended British schools, participated in British sports groups, had British neighbors, and attended British Army family events. In doing so, my entire JAG Corps

erability between organizations. The officer should establish opportunities for combined training between the United States and allied nations, leveraging relationships to optimize those opportunities for increased interoperability. For example, I helped generate short-term exchanges where JAs accompanied ALS officers on British Army warfighting exercises, and vice versa. In one instance, I worked with the Joint Readiness Training Center JA observer coach/trainer and a rotational brigade JA to embed an ALS officer into the U.S. brigade legal section during a training rotation at Fort Johnson, Louisiana. Similarly, I worked with the USAREUR-AF OJA and the 7th Mission Support Command to embed a Reserve JA with an ALS officer during a British armored brigade combat team's warfighting exercise at Salisbury Plains Training Area, England.

These short-term exchanges build a wider bench of JAG Corps and ALS officers with multinational expertise. The opportunities provide first-hand insight into their ally's capabilities. They enable an understanding of how an ally provides legal support to operations. Finally, they widen both armies' networks of multinational lawyers for future operations and exercises. Legal exchange officers are uniquely situated to identify and create these opportunities and see them through to completion.

## Notes

1. “Gen” is British Army slang for “trustworthy information.” However, “gen” has varying degrees of trustworthiness. “Scoff House Gen” has the lowest degree of trustworthiness. “Scoff house” is slang for “dining facility.” Telling incorrect “scoff house gen” does not result in adverse social consequences except for mild public ridicule. “Eyebrows gen” assures a higher level of trustworthiness. If the “eyebrows gen” turns out to be incorrect (also known as “duff gen”), the person telling the “duff gen” must shave off his or her eyebrows. “Robo gen” assures an even higher degree of trustworthiness, such that a person telling “robo gen” must shave his or her head to look like Robocop without a helmet. The British Army has other, less common adaptations of “gen,” which vary based on unit. If the inaccurate or untruthful individual fails to perform the consequence related to the appropriate level of “gen,” significant social implications ensue. Although the author did not suffer any consequences from providing “duff gen,” these assertions are nevertheless based on the author’s recent professional experience as an exchange officer with the British Army as part of the Military Personnel Exchange Program from July 2022-July 2024 [hereinafter Professional Experiences].
2. JALS Strength Report, 2024 Worldwide Continuing Legal Education, at slide 3 (Sept. 2024) (unpublished PowerPoint presentation) (on file with author).
3. The JAG Corps has an O-5 stationed with the British Army Headquarters, an O-4 stationed with 3rd (U.K.) Division, an O-4 stationed with the Polish Armed Forces General Command, and an O-3(P) stationed with 1st (Australian) Division. The position with the 1st (Australian) Division is not reciprocal. Additionally, the Bundeswehr has assigned a non-reciprocal military legal advisor to The Center for Law and Military Operations. Professional Experiences, supra note 1.
4. See History of the U.S.-U.K. Special Relationship and U.S. Policy, U.S. EMBASSY & CONSULATES IN THE U.K., <https://uk.usembassy.gov/our-relationship/policy-history> (last visited Jan. 15, 2025).
5. U.S. DEP’T OF DEF., NATIONAL DEFENSE STRATEGY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA sec. IV (2022) [hereinafter NDS]; see also Secretary Hegseth’s Message to the Force, U.S. DEP’T OF DEF. (Jan. 25, 2025), <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/4040940/secretary-hegseths-message-to-the-force>.
6. NDS, supra note 5, sec. II.
7. U.S. DEP’T OF ARMY, REG. 614-10, ARMY MILITARY PERSONNEL EXCHANGE PROGRAM WITH MILITARY SERVICES OF OTHER NATIONS para. 1-6 (14 July 2011) [hereinafter AR 614-10].
8. 10 U.S.C. § 311; see U.S. DEF. SEC. COOP. UNIV., HANDBOOK, SECURITY COOPERATION PROGRAMS 30 (2021).
9. U.S. DEP’T OF DEF., DIR. 5230.20, VISITS AND ASSIGNMENTS OF FOREIGN NATIONALS (22 June 2005).
10. See AR 614-10, supra note 7.
11. Id. para. 1-5(b).
12. Id. para. 5(c).
13. Id. para. 5(d).
14. Id. para. 1-4(b).
15. Id. para. 1-9.
16. Id. paras. 1-4(b)(2), 2-1, 2-2(7)(c) (the DCS, G-3/5/7 also obtains concurrence from the Office of the Secretary of Defense Policy before finalizing or altering programs).
17. Id. para. 3-2.
18. Id.; see also Memorandum from James Hennessey Jr. & Timothy Thompson, subject: Memorandum of Understanding Between the Government of the United States and the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on the Reciprocal Exchange of Army Personnel, sec. IV (17 Feb. 1988) [hereinafter U.S.-U.K. MOU].
19. AR 614-10, supra note 7, para. 3-3.
20. Professional Experiences, supra note 1.
21. Id. paras. 2-2(f), 5-3.
22. Id. para. 1-4(g).
23. OFF. OF THE JUDGE ADVOC. GEN., THE STRATEGY OF THE JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL’S CORPS 2022 [hereinafter JAGC STRATEGY].
24. Id.
25. Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Farquhar & Lieutenant Colonel Christopher T. Franca, U.S. Army JAG Corps & British Army Legal Services Exchange Officer Working Group, at slide 7 (May 2022) (unpublished PowerPoint presentation) (on file with author).
26. THE JUDGE ADVOC. GEN.’S LEGAL CTR. & SCH., U.S. ARMY, BEST PRACTICES OF MULTINATIONAL LEGAL INTEROPERABILITY SMARTBOOK A-3 (2024).
27. Lieutenant Colonel Justin Marchesi, Foundations of Multinational Legal Interoperability, ARMY LAW., no. 5, 2021, at 2, 3.
28. U.S. Army Europe and Africa, USAREUR-AF AOR and Operational Approach, at slide 2 (May 2023) (unpublished PowerPoint presentation) (on file with author).
29. See Memorandum from Deputy Chief of Staff, G-3/5/7, subject: Execution Approval for a Reciprocal Military Personnel Exchange Program Position with the United Kingdom (U.K.-69) (June 8, 2020).
30. See Position Description, U.K.-69, Deputy Chief of Staff, G-3/5/7, subject: For U.S. Army Participant with the British Army; Position Description, U.K.-69, Deputy Chief of Staff, G-3/5/7, subject: Position Description for British Army Participation with the U.S. Army.
31. E-mail from Major Matthew Gosnell to author (Aug. 23, 2023) (on file with author).
32. U.S. DEP’T OF ARMY, REG. 34-1, INTEROPERABILITY para. 1-8(c) (9 Apr. 2020).
33. U.S.-U.K. MOU, supra note 18, sec. 4(a)(v).
34. THE WHITE HOUSE, NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY 16 (Oct. 2022).
35. NDS, supra note 5, at 14.