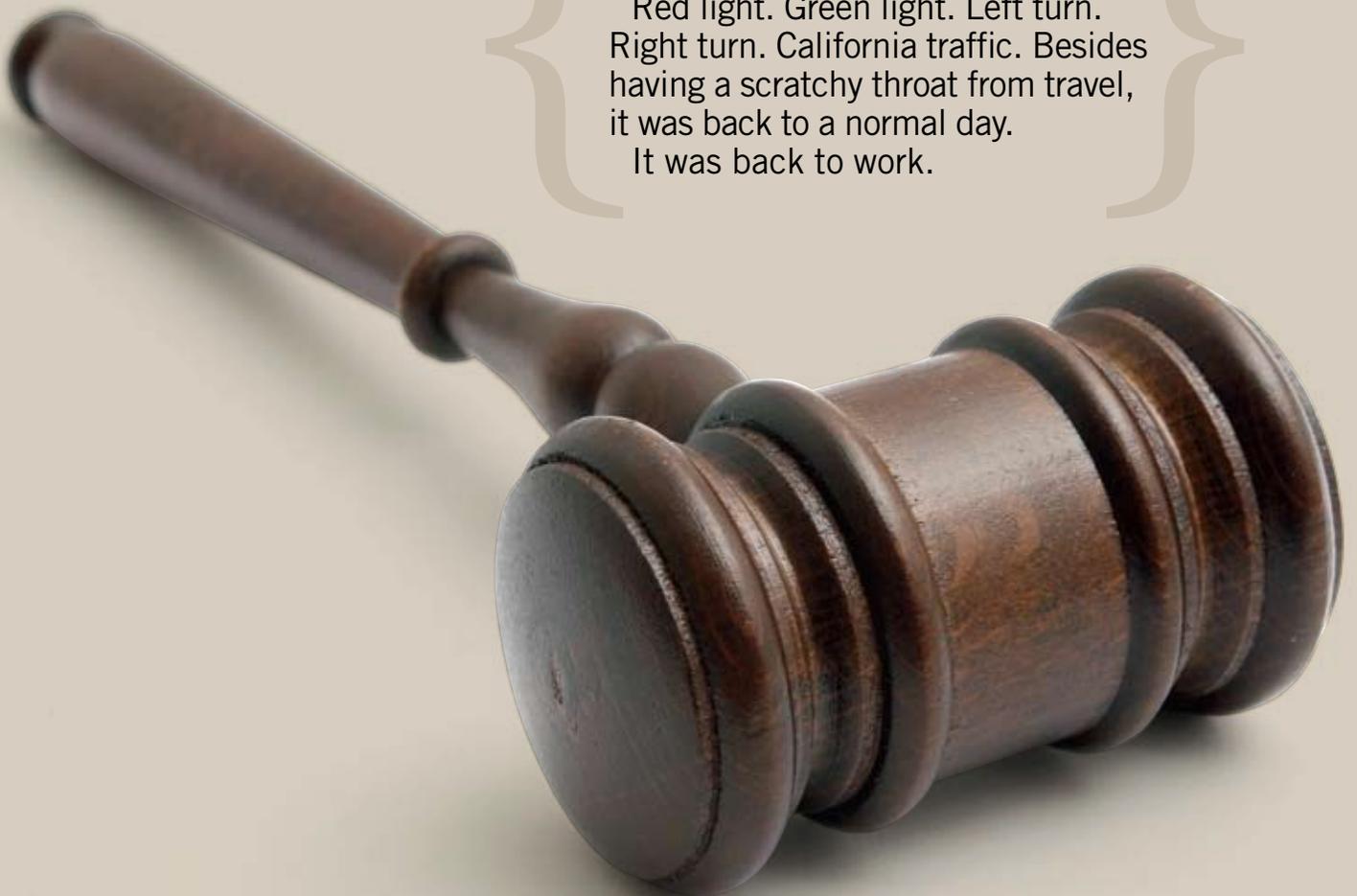




Standing up *for* Justice

By Stephanie Jeter '06

Lt. Col. Colby Vokey '87 drove himself home from the airport. Red light. Green light. Left turn. Right turn. California traffic. Besides having a scratchy throat from travel, it was back to a normal day. It was back to work.





Vokey was fired from his position of chief of defense counsels in the western United States, but was reinstated after protest from other lawyers. He plans to retire in May.



(left) Vokey in Afghanistan. He was the lead defense counsel for a Guantanamo Bay detainee for crimes the man allegedly committed while in the Middle Eastern country. (below) Vokey in 1985 as a sophomore in the Corps of Cadets Company H-2.

His short trip to Iraq was beneficial. He collected much-needed depositions from Iraqi witnesses and visited the crime scene of what media have called one of the biggest legal cases facing the military today—the murder investigation in Haditha, Iraq.

He is the case's lead defense counsel. Nov. 19, 2005, Haditha. A lance corporal from Texas died after a roadside bomb detonated under his vehicle. Twenty-four Iraqis died in the Marines' subsequent sweep of the area. One squad leader is now charged with several of their murders.

Guilty.

Not guilty.

What happened that day isn't made easier with either verdict. The only balm for those involved is the hope that justice be served.

At least, it should be served, Vokey said. As a dominant player in the trial, and chief of all Marine defense lawyers in the western United States, he knows the facts better than most. But here's what you need to know about Vokey:

He is a man of integrity.

He stands up for justice.

And he doesn't weaken under pressure.

Class of 1987

Vokey chose his college colors after spending the night with the Corps of Cadets. He was in high school and bunked with an older buddy from his hometown, a freshman from Dallas.

As he remembers, the freshmen had it rough. "You could tell it was hard," he said. "You could see that they got yelled at, but you could also see the cohesiveness they had as Aggies."

The bond was impressive. The Corps' code and disciplined lifestyle fit Vokey as snug as the standard khaki uniforms, and "in about 10 minutes, I was sold. I didn't even care about any of the other applications for other colleges.

"I fell in love with it the first night I was there."

When the acceptance letter came, he wrote down "engineering" as his major.

The Corps of Cadets was fun, but it was the regimented adversity it provided that drew him into more serious service.

"When I came in, I didn't know I wanted to be in the military," he said. "I started noticing the Marines. It was hard not to." One he remembers in particular. He was a major and an instructor, the second highest-ranked Marine at Texas A&M. "I had contact with him on the drill team," Vokey said.

The Marine had a destroyer's stare. He was crisp, well spoken, "incredibly sharp looking" with a "commanding presence."



"We would joke that he could kill us by looking at us. Just looking. He was everything I wanted to be," Vokey said. "Awe inspiring. The model that I follow."

And like that, his moderate leaning toward joining the Navy was reshaped. The few. The proud. The Marines called his name.

Vokey was commissioned the same year he graduated with a degree in political science. He was an artillery officer in Okinawa, Japan, and in combat operations during Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

While in Okinawa, he was called for jury duty in a court-martial. The prosecutor in the trial was a major, Vokey said, a high-title leader with high confidence. But the lieutenant defense council chosen to represent the accused Marine, "he was new," Vokey said. "He wasn't confident and did not seem to know what he was doing."

Vokey is the type of person who grows through situations, and this



one made him angry. “I sat there and watched it go on,” he said. “I thought, ‘I could do better than that lieutenant.’” he said. “I felt sorry for that Marine.” An unbalanced court system isn’t an enabler of justice. “He deserved better.”

By the time he was stationed in Texas a few years later, that experience in Okinawa finally grew a branch large enough to swing on. He went to law school.

In the courtroom

Vokey is not like the disoriented lieutenant. Since starting his career in defense, Vokey has crafted a name for himself by standing in the gap during big-name military cases. When newspapers call for comment, he has to ask for a reference. “Which case are you calling about?” The media call often.

Until recently he defended one of the accused in the well-known Guantanamo proceedings.

As both a prosecutor and defense counsel, he’s handled hundreds of cases within a system he says “has its faults.”

He found a river of issues flowing below the court’s floors.

Rules were being broken. Officials had a pinky finger in the scales of justice.

Just as the court system that handles charges filed in America is bound by rules, Vokey said the military’s court system must follow a set of guidelines. When the rules are broken, it is not a true legal system, he said. Instead, it’s an avoidance of the rule of law.

So he stood up and said something. “What was going on was wrong,” Vokey said.

When Vokey accepted the defense cases, he expected them to be difficult. “All the evidence is against you,” he said. But it’s especially hard to swim against the current, when “I was the only one speaking out against it.”

For example, in Guantanamo, “it was out of the realm of anything that I could have imagined. The rules were unfair.

It was a sham trial system,” he said. “I became disillusioned pretty quickly.”

It seemed that every rule was meant to be broken, he said. “You couldn’t even get down to meet with your client.

“Once I was on the case, I didn’t have a choice. It was my job to do, no matter how ugly it got. You can’t just walk away and quit.”

And because his job is also to follow orders, his speaking out against superiors made him a very unpopular person, Vokey said. The phone rang constantly with requests that he stop what he was doing. He had one-on-one meetings called by higher officials. But he stood his ground.

“Once I was on the case, I didn’t have a choice. It was my job to do, no matter how ugly it got. You can’t just walk away and quit.”

Those media calls started using his character as the headline. National Public Radio reported Vokey as a defender of the Constitution. The trial is still the news story, but it is his integrity that draws the masses.

It seems that he’s been put on an im-

possible pedestal, but he’s not looking for a parachute.

Why? “I think it was A&M,” Vokey said. “What I learned in the Corps and at A&M is what has served me up until now.

“Before I went to college, I had no idea what I wanted to do in life. A&M allowed me to focus my energies.”

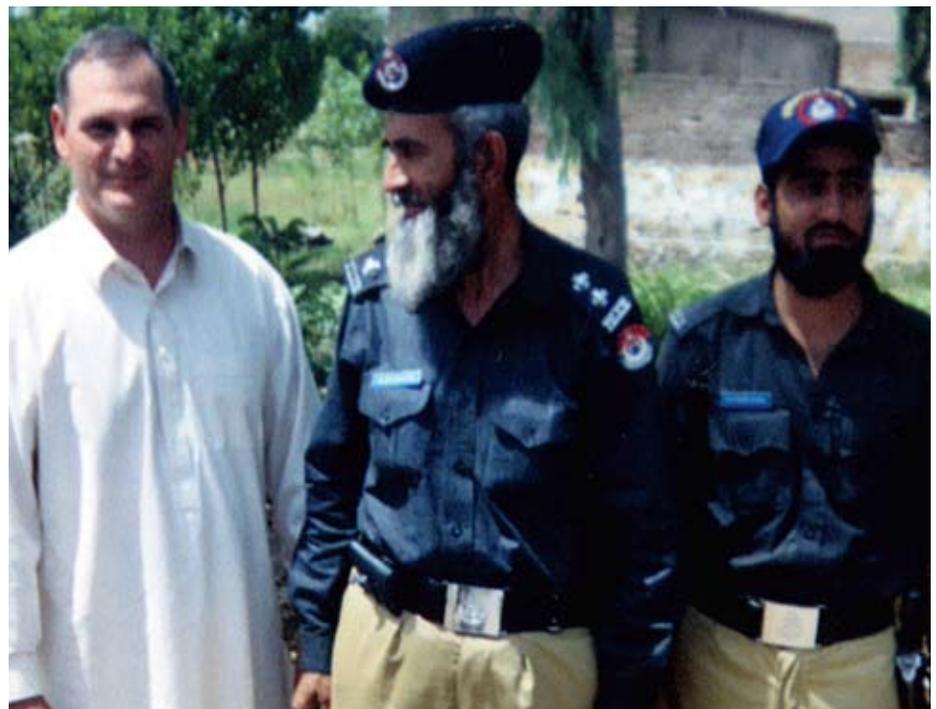
He said it was A&M’s academics, the campus environment, the Corps of Cadets and its code of honor mirrored by the university. He learned how to interact with people and how to work as a team—you start out learning how to be a student and learning how to follow, he said. Then, “the last couple of years, you are learning to be a leader. Everything about A&M prepares you to be a leader.”

He makes his way to campus every once and a while. He and his wife, Cindy ’87, have three children. Their oldest daughter is Class of 2011. He speaks to classes and remembers when he was the one listening in the classroom.

Loyalty, excellence, leadership, selfless service, respect.

And always, integrity. 🇺🇸

Stephanie Jeter ’06 is a reporter, writer and photographer for *Texas Aggie* magazine and AggieNetwork.com. To contact her, e-mail SJeter06@AggieNetwork.com.



Vokey in Pakistan with police from Northwest Frontier Province in 2006.