

One of the Finest—

Remembering the Life of Colonel Paul G. Tobin

Col. Paul G. Tobin, the first director of Jefferson County's public defender program and a former President of the Louisville Bar Association, died on June 23rd at the age of 84.

Tobin was a veteran of three wars as a member of the armored cavalry and the Office of the Judge Advocate General. During the Vietnam conflict, he served as Chief Military Trial Judge for all Army commands west of the 180th meridian, including Southeast Asia. He was the only military judge in history to be wounded by enemy fire while conducting a trial. He received numerous military honors, including the Legion of Merit with cluster, Bronze Star, Commendation Medal with cluster and the Purple Heart. Among the many important assignments he undertook during his illustrious military career, none was more interesting than his term as Governor of Spandau, the military prison in Berlin in which the Allies held the most infamous Nazi war criminals, including Albert Speer and Rudolph Hess. Tobin retired as a Colonel after 34 years in the Army before accepting the position as Executive Director of the Louisville-Jefferson County Public Defender Corporation in 1972.

"Colonel Tobin was a true pioneer in the public defender movement in Kentucky, as well as the rest of the country, following the U.S. Supreme Court's decisions in *Gideon* and *Argersinger*," said Dan Goyette, Chief Public Defender. Tobin hired Goyette in 1974, and he succeeded Tobin in 1982. "The Colonel's commitment to equal justice, and his exceptional legal and leadership abilities, are largely responsible for the quality and success of the public defender system in Kentucky today," stated Goyette.

The Louisville-Jefferson County Public Defender program was the first staffed public defender office in the state. Its attorneys have always worked full-time as defenders and focused exclusively on the professional representation of clients from the initiation of criminal charges against them until final dis-

position of their cases. From the beginning, Tobin said the major objective of the office was to provide "a vigorous, aggressive defense of the indigent accused," according to a 1972 interview in *The Courier-Journal*. "We will handle the case just as if the defendant had hired the best law firm in town," Tobin promised. And, based upon the numerous courtroom victories and national awards the office has achieved in the ensuing 33 years since that interview, it is apparent that Tobin and those who followed him made good on his promise. According to Charlie Ricketts, former LBA President, "As a result of what Paul Tobin did with that office, when you're represented by a public defender in this town, you're getting the best."

Bob Ewald, a member of the firm then known as Wyatt, Grafton & Sloss, led the national search for a director of the fledgling program after incorporating the defender organization in 1971 with a group of several other LBA members and securing a federal grant for its first year of operation. Now President-elect of the Kentucky Bar Association, Ewald says that Tobin "changed the way criminal law was practiced in Jefferson County." Circuit Court Judge Geoffrey Morris agrees. "He changed the landscape of criminal defense practice in the early 1970's, and he also started the careers of many of the key players in the justice system today," said Morris, who is one of several sitting judges who worked for Tobin.

Goyette noted that Tobin's commitment to the public defender program never waned. "He served on our board of directors from the day of his retirement until the day of his death, and he never missed a meeting in those 23 years," said Goyette. "We will miss him very much, both personally and professionally. He was, quite simply, one of the finest men and lawyers I've ever known."

Tobin was admitted to practice before the U.S. Supreme Court and Court of Military Appeals. He was a member of the Kentucky

and Wyoming Bar Associations. He served as a member of the Kentucky Continuing Legal Education Commission and the KBA House of Delegates. He was a former chair of the Kentucky Prepaid Legal Service and was a member of the Kentucky Public Advocacy Commission. He was a Life Fellow of the American Bar Foundation and served in the ABA House of Delegates.

Tobin was elected President of the Louisville Bar Association in 1982 and was a founder and Fellow of the Louisville Bar Foundation. He was named "Lawyer of the Year" in 1976 by the LBA and, in 1985, he received its Distinguished Service Award.

The LBA extends its heartfelt sympathy to his widow, Ruth Duncan Tobin, a past President of the Louisville Bar Auxiliary, as well as to the rest of the Tobin family. ■

