

Leadership Achievement AWARD



LT. COL. (RET.) NORA RULE '02

An Island of Her Own

From cadet advocate to pioneer in military justice reform

By David Bitton

Lt. Col. (Ret.) Nora Rule '02 was just three years old when her father decided his daughters would have more opportunity in the United States than in South Korea, turning what was supposed to be a brief diplomatic posting into a permanent move.

The family stayed, and Col. Rule grew up with her father's military service in the Republic of Korea Army and his subsequent work with the U.S. Department of Defense as a constant, formative presence — long before she understood it as the seed of her own path.

That interest sharpened into purpose because of one woman: Col. (Ret.) Paula Gould, Col. Rule's Academy liaison officer, who opened her own military family to a curious teenager and showed her what service looked like day to day.

"She really connected with and invested in me," Col. Rule says of Col. Gould. "I could see how her love of service and the Air Force was real and palpable."

Col. Rule is a 2025 Leadership Achievement Award recipient, an honor reserved for U.S. Air Force Academy graduates who have reached a high level of professional accomplishment in military or civilian life, while upholding the Academy's standards of integrity and character.



Top: Lt. Col. (Ret.) Cathy Almand '90, left, AOG board chair, and Mark Hille '97, Association & Foundation president and CEO, present Lt. Col. (Ret.) Nora Rule '02 with the Leadership Achievement Award.

Right: Col. Rule shares her thanks after being honored with the Leadership Achievement Award.



Above: Nora (Cho) Rule as a USAFA cadet



Above right: Col. Rule celebrates with classmates and friends after receiving the Leadership Achievement Award.

A LABORATORY FOR LEADERSHIP

Col. Rule arrived at the Academy in 1998, nearly two decades after the first class of women graduated. She was soon appointed Cadet Wing human relations officer, advising on sexual harassment claims.

Climate assessments from that era underscored how recently conditions had changed at the Academy. Just a few years before Rule arrived, women had been barred from squadron assembly rooms and from intramural competition.

"There are these fearless women who came before me who paved the way. I am awestruck at how courageous they were," Col. Rule says. "If they had just gone with the flow and didn't fight for every inch, I wouldn't have had the positive and incredible experience that I did at the Academy."

She captained the women's lacrosse team through a historic season, leading the program to its first national championship game appearance. Looking back on her years as a cadet, she describes the Academy as a place to study every style modeled by the upperclassmen who trained her and then test her own limits.

"You don't fully appreciate it as a cadet, but the Academy is the ultimate leadership laboratory," she says. "It's the place to try different things, watch your classmates figure it out alongside you, and learn exactly what works and what doesn't. Ev-

eryone there should be experimenting, because it is absolutely the safest place to fail."

ON AN ISLAND

Col. Rule initially commissioned as an acquisitions officer before earning a highly competitive slot to attend law school, joining the JAG Corps, where she was ultimately recognized by the Judge Advocate General as one of the top five attorneys in the corps. She deployed with the Army in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and later as a staff judge advocate during Operation New Dawn.

But she says the case that defined her career, and tested her most, came as a founding leader in the then-Department of Defense's Special Victims' Counsel program.

Col. Rule became the first SVC to represent a victim and testify before the Senate Armed Services Committee, capping off a grueling two-year period of intense representation that challenged decades of Feres Doctrine precedent.

"To do the job right as a victim's counsel, you need to be free of any pressure from the chain of command," Col. Rule says. "At the time, with all the media scrutiny and high stakes, it was daunting and truly felt like I was on an island. But looking back, being on that island wasn't because I was abandoned — it was because they trusted me. The Air Force spent years training me,

and when it counted most, they backed off and gave me the autonomy to execute."

She credits then-Judge Advocate General Lt. Gen. Christopher Burne for protecting that space during this time, even as pressure mounted.

"General Burne modeled the exact leadership you want in critical moments," she says.

The historic SASC hearing was just the beginning of her impact. Col. Rule's groundbreaking work propelled her to a seat on the DoD Sexual Assault Accountability Task Force, where she used her frontline experience to reshape how military command approaches sexual assault cases across all branches.

TAKING CARE OF PEOPLE

Col. Rule says her approach to leadership traces back to her first JAG assignment at McConnell Air Force Base, Kansas, under her deputy SJA, Maj. Jack Hopkins.

"At the time, I honestly thought he was being annoying, forcing me to rewrite my own OPR bullets over and over," Col. Rule laughs. "I didn't realize he was actually teaching me the skills required to be an effective AF leader. You have to know how to build a great record to get promoted into senior command. But once you are in the chair, those exact same skills are what give you the leverage to truly lift up your people."

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Right: Col. Rule during training ahead of her 2009 deployment to Bagram, Afghanistan.

Below: Col. Rule celebrates receiving the Leadership Achievement Award with husband Lt. Col. (Ret.) Andy Rule '02, sons James and William, and parents John and Annie Cho.



It sparked a mantra she has passed down to her own teams ever since: “To take care of others, you must first know how to take care of your own career.”

She ran with that exact playbook years later when overseeing 16 regional offices across the East Coast. Leading more than 80 attorneys and paralegals, Col. Rule put those precise bullet-writing skills to work, ultimately helping multiple subordinates secure prestigious awards and advance.

“I wasn’t just their boss,” she says. “I was directly responsible for their professional growth.”

Col. Rule brings that same strategic, mission-driven mindset to the private sector as vice president and associate general counsel at Amentum, drawing directly on

her decades of experience advising military commanders on high-stakes operations.

“A great lawyer isn’t just someone who stands on the sidelines telling you ‘yes’ or ‘no’ or reciting the law,” Col. Rule says. “Advising commanders taught me that legal must be an integral part of the solution. That is the exact value I try to bring to the corporate world — embedding myself into the business to help solve the problem and drive results. That mindset seems to be what decision-makers appreciate about my approach the most.”

Beyond her corporate role, Col. Rule dedicates her time to shaping the future of her community. She is the vice chair of the board of trustees at Hampton Roads

Academy and a board member for Free-kind, a Virginia-based nonprofit combating human trafficking. She and her husband, Lt. Col. (Ret.) Andy Rule '02, a former F-22 pilot, also evaluate service academy nominations for U.S. Sen. Tim Kaine and U.S. Rep. Bobby Scott, viewing it as a vital way to open doors for the next generation of leaders.

When reflecting on the Leadership Achievement Award, Col. Rule’s thoughts immediately turn to her peers. She shares the honor first with her classmates.

“I am incredibly proud to have graduated from the U.S. Air Force Academy, and I’m deeply honored by this recognition,” she says. “I am grateful for the lifelong friends who walked that path with me.”