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LAWYERS WITH MILITARY EXPERIENCE RECOUNT HOW IT HAS HELPED THEM IN THEIR CAREERS

By **MORGAN WALTERS**

Good attorneys often have excellent analytical, negotiation and oratory skills – and, in some cases, they also have military experience. Attorneys who served in the Armed Forces say what they learned in the military made them better lawyers.

“As a young soldier, the skill you would learn first is confidence,” said Frank Valverde, a former specialist in the U.S. Army and current partner at Uniondale-based Rivkin Radler, who credits the military for his decision to pursue a career in law.

Valverde spoke about a time when his mother would tell him he was good at arguing, but he never had the self-confidence to actually become an attorney. Then through the military, he gained the confidence to go after this dream.

“Working in the military, you learn a lot about yourself and what you can and can’t do,” said Mark Mulholland, a former Judge Advocate General’s Corps (JAG) officer and partner at Ruskin Moscou Faltischek in Uniondale.

The lessons Valverde learned in the military helped his legal career even before he became an attorney.

“It definitely helped me in law school,” he said, noting that while most of his classmates were finding their exams and studying stressful, he was calm and tackled each assignment he received. He said this feeling of calm under pressure is yet another skill he picked up from serving his country that gives him an edge over other lawyers.

Kenneth Hoffmann, a retired captain in the U.S. Army Reserve and current partner at Certilman Balin Adler & Hyman in East Meadow, agrees that being trained to “accomplish the mission” has helped him in his career. If a task needs to be performed, he will not follow the typical 9-to-5 work week. If he needs to work overnight, he will work overnight to get the job done.

As explained by Thomas Monroe, a coworker of Hoffmann and a former corporal in the

U.S. Marine Corps, the Marines are held to a high standard and more is expected of them, similar to what is expected of lawyers. He goes on to say that there are “professional and ethical obligations that are unique to both” careers and being trained in the Marines prepared him to have a better handle on these obligations.

One of the most important things the veteran-attorneys learned in the military that is relevant to their careers is the idea of chain of command. Monroe, who was in charge of about 10 people and \$10 million worth of assets during his service, explained that through that experience he learned which items needed to go up the chain of command and how to send them. The role also helped him learn what tasks or problems he should be able to take care of on his own. This applies to law when dealing with clients and others, Monroe said, noting he is now aware of when the person he is speaking to should make their managers aware of certain situations.

With this understanding of chain of command come leadership skills, which Valverde and Hoffmann said are among the most vital ingredients of a successful attorney. The ability to lead allows the attorneys to know how to manage junior attorneys and interns in a way that will bring out their strengths and make up for their weaknesses, in order to get the best results for clients. From their military experience, these attorneys learned how to make orders, listen to problems and show that they care in a productive manner.

While all of the attorneys interviewed for this article agreed that their military experiences were generally helpful, Valverde and Mulholland gained very specific skills that they feel immediately transfer to their law careers.

Valverde had the opportunity to compete in “Soldier of the Year” competitions, a series of tests in which he was drilled with questions ranging from the history of the Army to



Photo by Bob Gigliore

MARK MULHOLLAND: His military experience helped him land his first job as an attorney.

how various weapons worked. These questions were delivered under pressure by a board that was similar to a judge. Valverde claims this experience helped prepare him for the pressure that arises inside a courtroom.

As a JAG officer, Mulholland handled military trials and represented soldiers who had been court martialed. This allowed him to cross-examine hundreds of witnesses and work in the courtroom on a daily basis.

“Some people go a lifetime and do not have the opportunity to have that much experience,” he said.

All of the attorneys said everyone would gain something by serving in the military, but the opportunities that these men have had because of the military speak for themselves. Mulholland credits the military for his first job at Willie Farr & Gallagher in Manhattan. Monroe also received job interviews because the interviewers were veterans, and his first job as a law clerk was for a judge who is a Vietnam veteran.

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