Veterans to Know: A Q&A with Banner Witcoff's Robert Altherr

Banner Witcoff is proud to have several veterans on our team, and a veterans' affinity group to provide them with a community to network and bond together on common issues including the advancement of veteran team members and identifying pro bono cases related to veterans' issues.

The firm also is set to donate 500 stockings to Soliders' Angels Holiday Stockings for Heroes, more than double what was donated last year. The stockings will be sent to veterans in VA hospitals, and/or deployed service members.

We appreciate their service and are grateful to all those who have served and continue to serve.

This year, in honor of Veterans Day, we asked one of our veterans – Banner Witcoff attorney Robert Altherr – a few questions about his service.

Can you tell us about your military career?

I attended the University of Cincinnati College of Engineering on a four-year R.O.T.C. scholarship. When I graduated in 1974, I received a Regular Army commission as an Infantry Second Lieutenant. Following the Infantry Officer Basic Course and Airborne Training at Fort Benning, GA, I was assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, NC where I served for three years as an infantry paratrooper rifle platoon leader and mortar platoon leader. I was lucky enough to be one of twenty-five army officers selected to attend law school full-time while on active duty during the next three years. During the summers while in law school, I worked for the Staff Judge Advocate General Office at Fort Knox, KY prosecuting special court-martials. After promotion to the rank of Captain and graduation from law school and the Judge Advocate Basic Officer Course, I was assigned to the 5th Infantry Division Staff Judge Advocate Office at Fort Polk, LA where I served for two years as the Chief of Administrative Law and as a Special U.S. Attorney prosecuting misdemeanors before the Federal Magistrate. My next assignment was as Command Judge Advocate of the U.S. Army Tank-Automotive Command, Warren, MI, and after passing the USPTO

bar examination, as a Patent Attorney Judge Advocate with the U.S. Army Tank-Automotive Research & Development Command. After four years, I was reassigned to the Patents, Copyrights & Trademarks Division of the U.S. Army Legal Services Agency in Falls Church, VA where I was promoted to the rank of Major and served for the next eighteen months. In less than twelve years, my wife and I had moved six times while on active duty. Having completed all of my years of service obligation for the civilian education that the Army had provided me, I resigned from active duty Regular Army to pursue a civilian legal career and was commissioned as a Major in the Army Ready Reserve.

As a JAGC Major in the Army Ready Reserve, I served the next seven years assigned to the Office of the Judge Advocate General Contract Law Division at the PENTAGON. Upon promotion to Lieutenant Colonel, I was reassigned to the US Army Legal Services Agency Litigation Division and Intellectual Property Law Division in Arlington, VA where I served for seven years. In 1997, I graduated from the U.S. Army War College, Carlise Barracks, PA, and was subsequently promoted to the rank of full Colonel.

Following the 911 terrorist attacks in 2001, I was assigned to the Legal Office of the Joint Forces Space Command and North American Aerospace Command (NORAD) at Petersen Air Force Base, CO where I served as an Operations Law Legal Advisor to provide legal advice regarding rules of engagement with respect to threats to civilian commercial aircraft and military satellite systems, until my retirement as a full Colonel in 2004 after thirty years of combined Active Duty service (thirteen years) and Army Ready Reserve service (seventeen years).

How does your military experience help with your legal practice?

My legal practice for more than the last thirty years has consisted almost entirely of intellectual property litigation, most of it as a first chair litigator in US District Court patent infringement suits. Patent infringement litigation is a fight that requires a coordinated team effort with planning and strategizing your case, assigning task responsibilities, motivating your team members to accomplish assigned tasks in a professional manner and following up to ensure that all tasks necessary for mission accomplishment are completed.

The Army taught me how to fight, lead a coordinated team, plan and strategize, assign task responsibilities, motivate team members and follow up to ensure that all tasks required for mission accomplishment were completed. The most important lesson was learning how to identify the respective skills of my team members and tailoring the tasks assigned to each team member to take advantage of those individual skills to give the best chance for each individual team member to be successful and thereby ensure completion of the mission by the team as a whole. Everyone wants to be successful. The leader’s job is to create the environment and assign the tasks that will

provide the greatest opportunity for every team member to be successful. The Army taught me that and I try to lead by incorporating that skill into every matter I undertake in my legal practice.

What does Veteran's Day mean to you?

Veterans Day is a day to honor all of the current and former service men and women who have served this country in good times and in bad times and their families. It reminds me of my father and uncles who served during World War II, the Korean War, and the Cold War of the 1950s and 1960s. It reminds me of the many fine service men and women with whom I served for over thirty years and the many fine service men and women who continue to serve and sacrifice for this country today and their families. Veterans Day especially reminds me of Arlington National Cemetery, a beautiful, solemn place that my wife and I have often visited and which impresses upon me how much so many have given up over the years to make the United States the best place to live and the greatest nation on earth.



2ND LIEUTENANT INFANTRY PARATROOPER PLATOON LEADER
82ND AIRBORNE DIVISION – 1976



SECOND LIEUTENANT INFANTRY PARATROOPER PLATOON LEADER
82ND AIRBORNE DIVISION – 1975



COLONEL, JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL CORPS
ARMY RESERVE – 1997

See our previous Veterans Day Q&A posts by clicking the links below:

Matt May

Chris Galfano

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