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Jeremy Wallace: From Air Force Language Analyst to Lawyer Giving Back to Vets

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For Jeremy Wallace, language has brought profound satisfaction to his life — in big ways and small.

As a staff sergeant in the U.S. Air Force, Wallace spent 18 months learning Mandarin Chinese before spending the rest of his four-year contract working as a cryptologic language analyst in Washington, D.C., at the National Security Agency's headquarters.

When he got out in 2016, Wallace used his gift of language to fulfill a lifelong dream of becoming a lawyer — doing well at SMU Dedman School of Law, passing the bar exam and now practicing complex commercial litigation in Greenberg Traurig's Dallas office.

These days, you can find Wallace spending his free time either maintaining his Duolingo streak (IYKYK) while he studies Japanese or merging his identities as a linguist, veteran and lawyer by giving back to other veterans in need.

Over the last year, Wallace has devoted more than 100 hours representing veterans pro bono. With GT colleagues Brian Mason and Alex Hartzell, Wallace recently resolved a fraud and negligent misrepresentation lawsuit on behalf of an active duty family who sued the sellers of their new home after learning the sellers had made material misrepresentations that swayed the family's decision to purchase it.

Through a partnership with the Veteran Advocacy Project, Wallace, Hartzell and associate Zachary Tobolowsky are currently representing a veteran appealing his dishonorable discharge from the military since part of the reason he was discharged 20 years ago "is not a reason that you would be discharged today," Wallace said.

"We're in the process of getting paperwork done and filling out the necessary application materials so we can petition to the [Board of Corrections for Naval Records] to evaluate, reconsider and hopefully upgrade his discharge to get him the appropriate status — hopefully honorable discharge — and let him

recover the benefits and reputation that he lost at the outset," Wallace said.

It is Wallace's positive experience in the Air Force and position of privilege as a lawyer that drive him to "pay to forward" and help other veterans pro bono — something he says he plans to keep doing.

"I got a lot out of the military. I'm very thankful for the friendships, the experience, the skills — everything," he said. "I also have friends who served who were injured. I know many people serve and they don't leave unscathed."

He says he's also motivated to help veterans because he knows there is a substantial disconnect between the benefits veterans are entitled to post-service and the support often needed to obtain them.

"Veterans are entitled to disability benefits, education benefits, discharge benefits. And there's something to the idea that when you separate, [many] don't get pro bono services," Wallace said. "If they don't get that help, they aren't going to get rights,

resources or support that they need.

"Knowing that those two sometimes won't connect unless somebody steps in and offers their time and services can be unsettling, but it's also motivating," he added. "It makes the work all the more fulfilling."

Asked where he currently sees the most demand for pro bono veteran support, Wallace said "anecdotally" that he sees the greatest need in post-separation services — obtaining disability benefits, in particular, due to the complexity of the process, the foresight needed to collect and present evidence or a delayed realization by the veteran of their need for the benefits.

"I personally am going to focus on [disability benefits pro bono] more over the next year because I see so much of a need for that and because ... what I've seen and heard so far, [that area] appears to be very complicated," he said. "That's the kind of skillset that somebody in my shoes as a lawyer can serve



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the most — to be somebody who can help navigate the complicated procedure and substantive issues of a VA disability claims process with somebody who's just trying to be made whole again.”

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Wallace couldn't pinpoint exactly how he knew that he wanted to be a lawyer (other than, perhaps, reading “too much John Grisham” growing up), but he said he wanted this career path from a young age.

After obtaining his bachelor's degree from Texas State University, Wallace opted to gain life experience in the military, to see more of the world and to make sure a legal career was what he truly wanted before investing all the time and money law school requires.

Despite having multiple family members in the Army, Marines and Navy, the Air Force was the only branch Wallace considered. He enlisted in 2012.

“My decision to go into the Air Force was, lightheartedly, not appreciated,” he said.

Wallace spent the first year and a half of his service in Monterey, California, at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, where he spent seven hours day “and several hours of homework” every night learning Mandarin Chinese.

He spent the next two-and-a-half years working in the NSA's headquarters “while still being active duty,” he said. He worked with “civilian counterparts on a mission within the building,” but that's about all he could say about his work there.

From a “big picture perspective,” Wallace said what he enjoyed most about being a language analyst was “the idea of being able to see the impact of my work” and the “success and failures” of his team's analysis and effort.

Now that he is a lawyer, Wallace can't exactly pinpoint whether his organization and communication skills exclusively came from his military experience, but it certainly helped.

“What I do substantively now is nothing like what I did substantively when I was in the military, but the way I go about the job — the communication, the accountability, the integrity — it's all going about a job, an assignment, a mission ... the same way, even if the subject matter is completely different,” he said.