

BRADLEY ERDOSI: A LAWYER FOR WARRIORS

by SHENIECE SMITH



Left to right: COL Rick Lalor, COL Paul Bryant, Bradley Erdosi, CPT Antoinette Balta, and COL (Ret.) Pete Seitz



On November 10, 2015, Bradley Erdosi will receive the first annual Lawyers for Warriors Award from Veterans Legal Institute (VLI) at the Center Club in Newport Beach. It is truly fitting that Brad be the first and the exemplary recipient of this award, and that all award-ees follow in his footsteps. Brad has been an active and contributing member of the community for years. With a desire to be a direct part of the justice system, Brad joined the Los Angeles Public Defender's office in 2002 where he ensured that defendants exercised every ounce of their American rights and received adequate counsel to advocate for justice.

Later, Brad moved to Orange County and proceeded to make his mark here. By day, he runs the Law Offices of Bradley S. Erdosi, offering services in the areas of estate planning, probate, and elder law. By night, he lends his time and talents to causes such as sitting on the Board

of Directors for the Orange County Bar Association, teaching at Whittier Law School, and giving education presentations on estate planning, among other things. Recently, Brad also joined the Board of Directors for Veterans Legal Institute (VLI).

VLI is the nation's only military-specific full-fledged legal aid program that provides an array of legal services to veterans free of charge. VLI aims to eradicate barriers to housing, education, employment, and healthcare, while fostering self-sufficiency. In less than a year, VLI has served over 500 local veterans, active service members, and reservists, filling the void and answering the call for *pro bono* legal assistance. VLI also advocates on behalf of its clients by providing community education and policy advocacy in an effort to increase awareness, resources, and overall protections to current and former members of the U.S. military. And the organization depends on lawyers to volunteer to serve

the veterans in these various capacities.

Since the inception of VLI in 2014, Brad has contributed greatly to this organization's success. Not only is Brad a board member and the Treasurer for VLI, he is also an avid volunteer. In 2014, Brad was invited to the Los Alamitos military base by Captain Antoinette Balta, who is also the President and Founder of VLI. There, Brad provided free estate plans for more than fifty reservists.

Although our service members put themselves in the line of danger for our nation every day, many of them fail to realize the importance of having an estate plan for their own families. Brad could not bear the thought of this. Not only did he work with the men and women on the base, he also followed up one-on-one with those who had more complicated situations.

Beyond being a volunteer and board member for VLI, Brad brings awareness to issues effecting veterans by his direct advo-

cacy and educating others on the subject. Amongst many other publications and speaking events, Brad co-authored *How to Avoid the Catastrophic Costs and Effects of Long Term Care*, which involves how to apply for and appropriately utilize military benefits.

Brad says his knowledge of veterans law is self-taught. When he started working with veterans nearly seven years ago, it was primarily because he became aware of how underserved our veteran population is. Through Brad's estate planning practice, he continuously saw clients who were eligible for veterans benefits, but were not even aware the benefits existed and did not have a reliable place to turn for assistance. Brad started researching veterans benefits and educating himself on how to obtain the benefits so that he could better serve his clients.

Brad recalls a case that had a significant impact on him and his client. In the process of assisting a client who had come to Brad for basic estate planning, with no knowledge that he could be eligible for veterans benefits due to his past service, Brad saw an opportunity to better the life of a deserving client. The client was a Vietnam veteran with a heart condition that was detrimental to his health. It took one-and-a-half years for Brad to work through the strenuous Veterans Administration process and paperwork, but the result was a monthly benefit of approximately \$3,000 per month for the client. Brad recalls the significant difference that this benefit made for the client, and particularly how grateful the client was when he received the news. The idea that this veteran may have never discovered this benefit and would have struggled without this money was disheartening to Brad, and he was motivated to not only make veterans aware of the funds set aside for them, but also help them obtain those benefits.

Veteran benefits are often difficult to obtain due to lack of information, complicated applications, and stringent qualification guidelines. It is very difficult for many veterans to complete the process on their own. Further, veterans who are mentally or physically ill struggle with additional barriers to obtaining the assistance available to them. Attorney assistance is critical to this process.

Brad realizes that it is intimidating to go into an attorney's office and ask for help.

Veterans in distress may struggle with this even more, which could lead to their not receiving the help they need. Brad hopes that the outreach provided by organizations like VLI will ultimately make this easier for veterans by setting a tone that attorneys are here to help veterans. He wants to show appreciation for their service by giving back to them. Brad says that he receives great satisfaction from his work. He says that veterans are so appreciative although, ironically, they feel so underappreciated. Brad says, "We should be protecting our veterans. We should be helping our veterans. That is why organizations like VLI are so great."

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Recently, Brad had the opportunity to work with a 98-year-old woman who is a World War II veteran, calling the experience a "privilege." World War II veterans are dying at a rate of approximately 492 per day. It is estimated that by 2036 there will not be any more living World War II veterans to share their experiences. See, e.g., *The National WWII Museum New Orleans, Living WWII Veterans by State 2015*, <http://www.nationalww2museum.org/honor/wwii-veterans-statistics.html>. Growing up with a father who was a nursing home administrator, Brad was raised to spend a lot of time interacting with people. He developed a great appreciation for the contributions that seniors have made to society, particularly veterans. Therefore, he

really appreciated the opportunity to work with a veteran who was a part of America's great history, especially given the rarity of women war veterans from that era.

Brad encourages other attorneys to take the time to volunteer for any cause that they can be proud of, but encourages attorneys to strongly consider helping a veteran. Brad encourages attorneys not to worry about lack of knowledge of veterans law. Organizations like VLI have the knowledge and processes to guide volunteers who are willing to learn. Attorneys can also volunteer to assist veterans in an area of the law that they already practice in.

Brad recently received the Wiley W. Manuel Award for the provision of volunteer legal services to the poor or disadvantaged, improving the law and the legal system, and increasing access to justice. Brad provided an astonishing 300 hours of *pro bono* legal services in 2014 to earn this award. Amazingly, Brad did not even realize how many hours he had voluntarily dedicated to others until presented with this award. Volunteerism and good will is so ingrained in his spirit and lifestyle that he did not take the time to add up the hours; he simply felt it was the right thing to do. Regarding his many volunteer hours, Brad says, "It feels American. It may sound cliché but we live in the greatest place on Earth and we owe it to each other to give back."

Through all of his work, Brad has dedicated a significant amount of time to advocating for veterans and has proven to be a true advocate for our nation's warriors.



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