

VETERAN SPOTLIGHT

Colonel Terri R. Zimmermann

“Our country is not perfect, but I am grateful for the freedom we have to point out the deficiencies and try to fix them.”

—Colonel Terri R. Zimmermann

A father with a distinguished and decorated military career. A loving mother who gave endless support to every endeavor her daughter undertook. With a successful law practice, robust community engagement and her own highly decorated military career, Colonel Terri R. Zimmermann accounts her parents as the foundation of all her achievements, encouraging her to give back to the country and community.



“Neither of them were very happy about me joining [the military] when I told them (after the fact),” Colonel Zimmermann shared with me, “They didn’t want their ‘little girl’ to crawl in mud under barbed wire or worse, be on the receiving end of gunfire[.]” But after Colonel Zimmermann completed Officer Candidate School and received her commission, they couldn’t have been prouder: “They are two of my strongest supporters,” she said, “along with my husband, who was an enlisted Marine and law enforcement officer for over thirty years.”

A shareholder at Zimmermann Lavine & Zimmermann, P.C., Colonel Zimmerman has dedicated her life to advocating for military servicemembers and veterans both in and out of the courtroom. In 1989, she joined the Marine Corps (“Because I wanted the challenge of being part of ‘the best of the best.’”), and still serves as a drilling Reservist today, with plans to retire in 2023 (“When they make me!”). Over the course of her military career, she was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in 1990, and then was promoted to First Lieutenant, Captain, Major, Lieutenant Colonel, and then in 2012 she became a Colonel. A decorated officer, Colonel Zimmermann has earned numerous commendations, including but not limited to, the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal, the Meritorious Service Medal with Gold Star, the National Defense Service Medal with Gold Star, the Selected Marine Corps Reserve Medal, and the Global War on Terror Service Medal.

After graduating from law school and passing the Maryland

bar exam, she went on active duty in the Marine Corps and the Basic School in Quantico, Virginia. Afterwards she attended the Naval Justice School in Newport, Rhode Island for a nine-week course learning military law where upon graduation, she was certified as a Judge Advocate and began practicing military law.¹ After leaving active duty in 1996, Colonel Zimmermann transferred to the Marine Corps Reserve and began practicing with her father, Jack Zimmermann, in Houston. There, she learned

how to defend not only civilians in state and federal courts, but also servicemembers in military courts.

As military experience appears to collectively provide key skills and sensibilities, Colonel Zimmermann says the lessons and skills she learned while serving have transferred to the practice of law: “Learning to not only take direction from those with more seniority and experience, but to think on my own and communicate clearly with others are skills that I acquired early in my military career and still work on to this day,” she shared. “They



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are extremely useful in my law practice because there are new things to learn every day. ...Teamwork also is critically important – it takes a team to succeed in just about every endeavor. Being able to lead, delegate to, and learn from others exponentially increases the chance of success.”

Colonel Zimmermann is also involved in several military-and veteran-based community initiatives such as veteran treatment courts to address combat-related post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries. She was the first attorney to chair the State Bar of Texas’ Military and Veterans Law Section while on active duty, and currently serves as the chair of the Veterans Assistance Committee and Texas Criminal Defense Lawyers Association and vice-chair of the Military Law Committee and National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers.

And despite its recent politicization, it is Colonel Zimmermann’s belief that the military is an institution that beautifully represents a “melting pot” in our society, providing opportu-

nities for men and women of all backgrounds, ethnicities, and belief systems to learn, work, and grow together. “We all have strengths and weaknesses,” Colonel Zimmermann explained, “and it is the effective commander who understands his or her people and leads by maximizing the former and minimizing the latter. While some women are not as physically strong as some men, many are. And as more women prove their abilities, both physical and mental, their value to our armed forces will only be more acknowledged and appreciated. Like everyone else, female servicemembers should strive to be competent at their jobs and treat people with kindness and respect.”

Colonel Zimmermann has dedicated her personal and professional life to advocating the needs of servicemembers and vet-

erans. She has (and continues to) set an example to men and women alike, as well as the next generation of young military members who defy cultural stereotypes and have dedicated themselves to something bigger than themselves. 

Anietie Akpan is the Editor-in-Chief of The Houston Lawyer. She is staff counsel for the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County, Texas (METRO).

Endnotes

1. Military courts only hear criminal cases. However, there are military lawyers who practice other things such as labor law, environmental law, and “legal assistance” which includes some uncontested family law, landlord-tenant, and consumer protection issues.

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