

From Terror to Tranquility to Tikrit: Local Lawyer Heads to Iraq

For four years, attorney Mathew Tully has been living in the vortex of world history.

A transplant to Greene County after escaping the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001, and subsequently honored for his pro-bono defense of the civil rights of an Arab-American, Tully now is on his way as a soldier to the most dangerous area of Iraq, where his mission will be to assist efforts to seek out and destroy insurgents trying to disrupt the democratic process.

A major with the 42nd Infantry Division of the New York Army National Guard, Tully, 31, was scheduled to be deployed Saturday. After reporting for active duty in Troy, he was to report to Fort Drum on Tuesday.

Tully, interviewed last week, said he should be in Kuwait on or about Aug. 10 and in Tikrit, in northern Iraq, on or about Aug. 21.

"I'm hoping to be back as early as Christmas, but I could be on active duty for as long as two years," Tully said.

While in Tikrit, the hometown of former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, Tully will be stationed at forward operating base Danger, a name that did not sit well with his wife, Kimberly. Tully said the base probably gets its name from its location within the so-called Sunni Triangle, the area of Iraq from which Saddam drew his strongest support and which now is identified with the most fervent opposition to both to the American occupation and the Shiite-dominated Iraqi government.

Tully, a founding partner of the law firm Tully, Rinckey & Associates of Albany, said he volunteered for active duty despite his personal misgivings about the war in Iraq. He said he chose to volunteer because the time seemed to be right for him professionally and personally and because, as a member of the National Guard, it only was a matter of time before he would be deployed. This is the second time Tully has been activated.

"I was very vocal in my opposition to the war in Iraq," Tully said, adding that he believes President Bush's policy of pre-emptive strikes to be un-American and that the United States should not invade another country unless it commits an act of war upon America.

But Tully said that while he's not happy the country is at war, he will support his fellow soldiers and do his part.

Now a resident of the town of Niskayuna in Schenectady County, Tully graduated from Hofstra University in 1995 and attended Brooklyn Law School. From 1995-98, he served as an active duty paratrooper with the U.S. Army. After leaving the Army, he joined the National Guard.

The former resident of New York City said it was the terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, that

brought him and his wife to Greene County.

Tully was working for Morgan Stanley in an office on the 65th floor of 2 World Trade Center on 9/11, and said he and his co-workers all made it out of the building safely after the twin towers were struck by hijacked jets.

Nearly 3,000 people died in the New York City attacks.

"It brought me up to Greene County," Rully said of the attacks. "Shortly after 9/11, my wife and I decided that we didn't want to live in New York City. I had a ski condo in Hunter that we moved into full-time."

Tully opened a law practice in the Catskills while his wife sought her master's degree at SUNY Albany. While his firm later moved to Albany, he still maintains an office on William Street in the village of Catskill.

A press release from the firm announcing Tully's deployment said he has devoted his post-9/11 career to "defending citizens' freedoms and constitutional rights by ensuring the due process of law." For his work, Tully was this year's recipient of the American-Arab Committee's Anti-Discrimination Pro Bono Attorney of the Year award.

"I was happy to win national recognition for that," Tully said, adding that he received the award after working to help a federal law-enforcement officer, a Muslim, who was the victim of workplace discrimination.

Tully also has gained recognition for challenging the New York City Department of Environmental Protection's right to issue traffic tickets on non-reservoir roads in the city's upstate watershed.

While Tully is on active duty, Greg Rinckey will run the law firm. Tully said he is grateful to the people he works with who were "willing to step up and work extra hours to pick up my caseload."

Tully said the Greene County Bar Association also went above and beyond the call in helping to transfer his clients, and that Greene County Judges Daniel Lalor and George Pulver have gone out of their way to help smooth his transition from lawyer to soldier.