

Achieving new heights: Local attorney state's first space officer

Wednesday, December 24, 2008 5:16 AM EST

By ANDREW J. BERNSTEIN, The Saratogian

COLORADO SPRINGS — Lawyers in space? Well, maybe not yet, but local attorney Mathew Tully recently took one giant step for the legal profession.

Tully, a partner at Tully Rinckey, a law firm with offices in Albany and Washington D.C. specializing in military matters, and a major in the 42nd Division of the Army National Guard, based in Troy, recently completed training at the National Security Space Institute (NSSI) to become one of only 200 space operations officers in the Army.



"The Army recently put out a policy that requires all 18 divisions, 12 active duty and six reserves, to have one person qualified in space operations," Tully said.

Details of space operations are classified, Tully said, but noted that a lot of what he learned pertains to GPS technology used to track soldiers, assets and manage GPS-guided munitions.

"I learned how to use it and how to fix it," he said.

Part of the training also pertained to space-based intelligence.

"With satellites, the next logical step is that there is a reconnaissance element. We learn how recon satellites are used to help the war fighters. I learned what recon satellites are out there, and how I can help the private on the ground in Iraq," he said.

NSSI is a school at Patterson Air Force Base in Colorado Springs. It was created by former secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld to train members of the military and intelligence communities on the country's space-based assets.

"The army's take is that the two future war areas are space and cyber war, so Rumsfeld spent a lot of money in those areas," Tully said. "In five years, you'll see a lot more space warfare. These satellites cost billions, so why kill a tank when you can kill a satellite?"

While most of the nation's space assets are managed by the Air Force, Tully said the Army is a user of those same assets, and as such, it is interested in having personnel trained to use the systems.

Upon graduating from NSSI, Tully received the Air Force Space Medal, certifying him as a space professional. Most of the nation's space professionals are in the Air Force, and Tully noted that his

four-month NSSI class was unusual in that there were only two Air Force officers, out of 16 students. The rest of the students came from other branches of the military and the intelligence community.

"Generally, (the class) is the Air Force teaching the Air Force, but I was an odd ball," he said.

Tully, in addition to practicing law in the United States, has been admitted to practice in the Supreme Court of England and Wales, earning him the title of English Solicitor.

"I may be the first attorney to receive this training, and I'm certainly the first English solicitor," he said, adding that his legal experience in matters pertaining to the military allowed him to bring more background knowledge to the NSSI training.

"I'm at the forefront with this in the Army. I have combat experience in Iraq, plus being an attorney with space training, I'm able to bring a lot of experience," he said. "I was able to challenge my instructors and fellow-classmates, I was able to question things more than a military person would have, since I could ask questions about what treaties or conventions might apply," he said.

As far as actually venturing into space, Tully noted that the Army currently has six astronauts, and the first step going into space is becoming a space operations officer.

As to whether he might consider applying to become an astronaut by signing on to a two-year training program in Texas, Tully simply noted that he is heavier than the maximum weight of 200 pounds.

"I haven't been under 200 pounds since the sixth grade," he said.

More seriously, he noted that he didn't want to leave his successful law practice, which specializes in fighting employment suits brought by military reservists who return from deployment to find their job gone or changed.

Instead, Tully, 35, having served in the military since 1995, said he is excited to bring what he learned at NSSI to benefit New York.

"I'll certainly use what I've learned the next time I deploy, and even before that, you can use satellite technology to assess snowfall in a major natural disaster," Tully said. "I'm the only space professional in New York, and this state has never before been able to pick up a phone and call in space assets."

Mathew Tully writes a monthly column for The Saratogian. His next installment will appear in the Dec. 28 issue.