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Stress and Swagger: Shumaker Attorney Ryan Nichols Looks Back on 10 Years in the Marine Corps

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SARASOTA, FL – After you’ve spent a decade coordinating special forces units, negotiating at the Pentagon, and managing a \$41 million military budget, “stress” is a relative term.

Ryan Nichols’ law career has involved enough stress to overwhelm many other attorneys. As a prosecutor with the Sixth Judicial Circuit in Pinellas County, Nichols once tried more than 50 jury cases in a single year. “Attempted kidnapping, attempted murder — some pretty heavy stuff,” says Nichols. Now, as a member of Shumaker, Loop & Kendrick’s broker dealer arbitration team, Nichols handles last-minute corporate litigation crises and counts one of the biggest brokerage firms in the country among his clients.

The key to his poise? “When you make it through Marine Corps training, and you do your time in the Marine Corps, you know you can make it through anything.” Equal parts experience and swagger.

Nichols enlisted in the Marine Corps and joined the Reserves when he was still a student at Tulane University in New Orleans. After graduating, he was accepted to Officer Candidate School in Quantico, Virginia, “which is basically a 10-week gut-check of running through the woods, wading through swamps, and sergeant instructors making your life absolutely miserable with minimal sleep,” he says. And that was just the start of it.

As a second lieutenant, he first served with the 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing in Beaufort, South Carolina, supporting nine F/A-18 squadrons. Next, he handled acquisitions for tactical computer hardware for Marine Corps Aviation. In between trips to Bahrain and nine other countries, Nichols was flying twice a month to Washington, D.C., briefing funding committees at the Pentagon and talking to high-level executives from Boeing and Lockheed Martin. His budget? \$41 million. He was 29 years old.

His last billet was in Djibouti, Africa, as the country plans officer for Eritrea, Ethiopia and Sudan, tracking Al Qaeda activity under the guise of Army Special Forces “training plans.” “That was a really cool job,” says Nichols. “I had a top-secret security clearance and felt we were really making a difference.”

Eventually, Nichols decided he wanted to be a civilian again. "I didn't sleep much there for a little while," he says looking back on his 10 years in the Marine Corps. "It was the most fun I never want to have again."

After that, Nichols has felt consistently capable to excel through stress, from working through law school to his workload as a prosecutor to the ever-changing nature of his current position. In broker dealer litigation, Nichols works with various facets of the securities industry, including wrongful termination, recruiting issues, and counseling large wire houses in the transition of advisors and other contractual issues.

Two years ago, the group added a data breach arm to help companies deal with an increasingly important issue. "The liability for corporations is huge now. If they're not counseled properly, the monetary losses can be huge," Nichols explains. "We put ourselves in a position where, you get notice from a company that there's a breach, and we have to work very quickly to act in accordance with the very strict statutory requirements, in each state."

With Nichols' military background, that kind of quick thinking comes naturally. "The Marine Corp teaches you to deal with things that change minute-to-minute," he says. "The kind of litigation we're doing, nothing is planned out, and everything can change. It can be very confusing. You have to learn quite a bit on the fly. That's where the Marine Corps training comes in, dealing with stress and the management of several tasks at hand."

Of course, Nichols' affection and respect for his military service extends beyond his law career. "To be quite honest, the Marine Corps is just an amazing organization," he says. "The ethos, the spirit, the way they build you up. There's a certain kind of confidence you attain from being a Marine. To this day, if I meet anyone from any branch of the military, I know immediately if they were in the Marine Corps. Marines just have that certain type of swagger to them."

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