

# Family Heroes Drive Attorney Jeff Roberts to Honor Veterans with Pro Bono Legal Work

Jeff Roberts grew up with a family legacy of courageous military service. His family understood the value of freedom and its power to change everything.

In 1941, his grandfather, U.S. Navy Lt. Howard S. Roberts Sr., was piloting his TBF Grumman Avenger aircraft over the North Atlantic when he spotted a German U-Boat and unleashed a torpedo into the water that struck its target, leading to the first time ever that a U-Boat surrendered to an attacking aircraft.

Over 20 years later in 1966, his father, Marine Corps 1st Lt. Howard "Scotty" Roberts Jr., was piloting his UH34 helicopter "The Dog" over the jungles of Da Nang, Vietnam, when he landed in an active battle zone to pick up wounded soldiers. Undaunted by enemy fire into the cockpit, with bullets whizzing by his helmet, he got the damaged helicopter off the ground and 20 soldiers to safety.

Inspired by this passion to respect and serve our country, Jeff Roberts chose his own path to defend freedom by attending law school and becoming an

attorney. Filled with a sense of purpose, Jeff uses his law degree for the greatest good by providing tireless and exceptional pro-bono legal services to U.S. Veterans through his long-term support of Veterans Legal Institute® (VLI). Veterans Legal Institute® is a free nonprofit law firm that uses in-house attorneys and volunteer private attorneys to remove barriers to housing, healthcare, education, and employment for low income Veterans.

Many attorneys seek out organizations like Veterans Legal Institute® because they provide a valuable add-on by doing the ground work, locating qualified veterans, collecting relevant documents, providing free technical support, and doing preliminary research. By the time the case is placed with the pro-bono attorney, there is enough preparation to hit the ground running. This is extremely valuable for attorneys who may have temporary periods of time where their cases are not in active litigation and they can dedicate their resources in the immediate moment to



Jeff Roberts with VLI clients Lt. Col. Trippel and Donna Trippel

advocate pro-bono on behalf of a Veteran in need. Veterans Legal Institute® is one of the few wholly military-specific legal aids in the nation. VLI locates Veterans in need at its 60+ per year mobile legal clinics at Veteran hotspots like the VA Hospital in Long Beach, the North County Vet Center where combat Veterans get free mental health services, Starbucks Coffee, Saddleback College, home to over 2,000 combat Veterans, and other places where Veterans get life-changing services. Veterans also access free legal services by applying online at [www.VetsLegal.org](http://www.VetsLegal.org) or coming to the VLI office to make an appointment. VLI also receives referrals from over 100+ Veteran-serving organizations and is part of multiple collaboratives that aim to provide holistic support to Veterans and their families.

Forging a new future after military service is a time of excitement and uncertainty. Each Veteran has unique experiences and opportunities that present as they craft that new life after service. While many Veterans

transition with ever increasing support, there are times when unscrupulous business owners take advantage of a Veteran's goodwill and trust. To regain peace of mind and agency over their futures, these Veterans deserve to have the power of pro-bono legal care within reach so they can continue giving back at home.

Jeff Roberts ensures Veterans get this chance.

## Nothing Feels Better than Helping a Veteran Get Justice

Proud U.S. Army Veteran Destteny Castro took her new car to the dealership for repairs. When she returned to pick up the car, she was told the car couldn't be found. Two days later, the dealership told Destteny her car was stolen, even though there was no surveillance video showing a theft, and the dealership never reported the car as stolen. Incredulously, the dealership told Destteny they wouldn't pay for the car. For two years, Destteny tried every means available to solve the problem to get her car replaced, but all



U.S. Army Veteran Destteny Castro and Jeff Roberts

doors kept being slammed in her face.

Destteny turned to Orange County-based nonprofit Veterans Legal Institute® as a last hope, and VLI connected to Jeff who quickly took on her case for free. Leveraging his deep experience in uncovering facts of the matter, Jeff filed a public lawsuit highlighting the dealership's total disregard for a female Veteran.

Just two months after Jeff took up Destteny's case, justice was served. The dealership paid Destteny the full value of the vehicle they lost, and Destteny was able to purchase a new car.

With relief, Destteny reflected, "I went to the Veterans Legal Institute®, a group of pro-bono lawyers that help Veterans like me fight for their rights, and they helped me find someone who was willing to fight for me." Absent nonprofits like Veterans Legal Institute®, many Veterans who cannot afford to hire counsel do not access the very justice they fight to defend.

### Achieving Justice During COVID

While U.S. Army Lt. Col. Dieter Trippel was deployed to Iraq, and his wife, Donna, was out of town caring for her sick mother, an unscrupulous real estate agent sued the Trippels for a bogus breach of contract claim. The agent then lied, saying the lawsuit was served on the Trippels at their home when neither of them was present. They went so far as to claim the lawsuit was served to a white woman when Donna is African American.

Because the Trippels were never served with the lawsuit, the agent went to court and got a default judgment against the Trippels in 2006 for \$55,000, an amount that had ballooned to \$88,000 by 2020. When other attorneys tried and failed to get the job done, the Trippels turned to Veterans Legal Institute for help. VLI's staff attorney filed a motion to set aside the judgment and enlisted Jeff's pro-bono help to go to court and argue the motion.



In the midst of COVID, Jeff and the Trippels made the considerate decision to have the couple come to court to show the judge that Donna did not have the skin color of the person who supposedly was at the Trippel's home to get the lawsuit. The judge agreed with Jeff's presentation, threw out the entire \$88,000 judgment against the Trippels, and dismissed the entire case.

Gaining newfound peace of mind, the Tripples shared, "When everyone else was against us, VLI and Jeff Roberts stood with us and helped protect our savings and our home." Veterans Legal Institute® is a well-needed recourse for Veterans in need of free legal care. Sadly, cases like this are not uncommon, and the demand for free legal services far outweighs the resources available.

U.S. Veterans stand for freedom. Veterans Legal Institute® is grateful for the tenacious drive of pro-bono attorney Jeff Roberts and his firm, Roberts Jeandron, for standing alongside our local heroes. Jeff is one of hundreds of attorneys who have answered the call of service at VLI – these attorneys realize the importance

of access to justice for the Veterans who sacrifice so much to protect our freedom. As a sign of community, they dedicate their time and legal skillsets to ensure equal opportunity for our heroes, often times spending hundreds of hours each year to realize a positive outcome that would not have otherwise materialized. Attorneys from a variety of fields step up to provide services in estate planning for older adult and terminally ill Veterans, landlord-tenant, bankruptcy, complex Veteran benefit appeals, discharge upgrades for survivors of Military Sexual Trauma, and limited family law. As a result, many Veterans who otherwise would not be able to afford an attorney get the legal case they need from an attorney familiar with their respective area of law

If you are inspired to make sure our homeless, disabled, low-income, and at-risk Veterans have life-changing pro-bono legal care to restore hope for a new day, join Veterans Legal Institute®. There are many ways to engage: give back through board service, join the pro-bono attorney network, share professional and creative talents,

become a monthly donor in its Heroes Brigade, or sponsor or underwrite our annual networking and fundraising event – Lawyers for Warriors. To learn more, contact Antoinette Balta, Esq, LLM, Executive Director and Co-Founder at [abalta@vetslegal.com](mailto:abalta@vetslegal.com) or visit [www.VetsLegal.org](http://www.VetsLegal.org).



US Marine Corps Veteran 1st Lt. Howard "Scotty" Roberts Jr. and Jeff Roberts