

NEVADA TRAILBLAZERS

Meet Phillip Smith:

Nevada Attorney has been Overcoming Obstacles Throughout His Life

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A little more than a year ago, **Phillip Smith** stood to give an opening statement as counsel on behalf of a primary defendant in a multimillion-dollar tort case. He had parachuted into the case only a few weeks earlier. On top of that, he only had three months of civil law experience. While this was Smith's first time before a civil jury, he had dealt with similar challenges before. Smith has faced and overcome difficult obstacles his entire life.

When Smith started his senior year of high school in Las Vegas, college was not on his mind. He had moved to Las Vegas from Chicago with his grandparents in middle school. As a 3-month-old, his grandparents adopted him. He grew up reading encyclopedias and teaching himself to program computers. However, in high school, academics were not a top priority. He had his family. He had his friends. He had his job—working at the McDonald's near Circus Circus. And he had his bus pass, which he used to navigate between all three.



But, with an uncertain future lurking, Smith decided he, like several of the men in his family, wanted to serve his country. He enlisted in the U.S. Navy six months before his 18th birthday. He immediately stood out. After scoring in the top percentile on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery, Smith ascended through the non-commissioned ranks. For the next five years, he served as an operations specialist onboard the USS Shiloh, interpreting radar data and briefing commanding officers, including an admiral, on the tactical situation in the Persian Gulf while deployed there.

“Joining the Navy was one of the best decisions I’ve ever made,” Smith said about his military service. He cherished his time in the Navy. He learned structure, discipline and resiliency. Yet after five years, higher education was on his radar.

Following the Navy, Smith took classes at a community college in California. Upon the urging of a classmate who recognized his talent while reading a paper he wrote, and against the advice of a cynical guidance counselor, Smith applied and was accepted to a school in northern California he previously knew little about—Stanford University.

At Stanford, Smith elected to pursue a career as a lawyer. After graduating from Stanford with distinction, he crossed the country to attend Yale Law School. Fun fact, in addition to his more academic law school

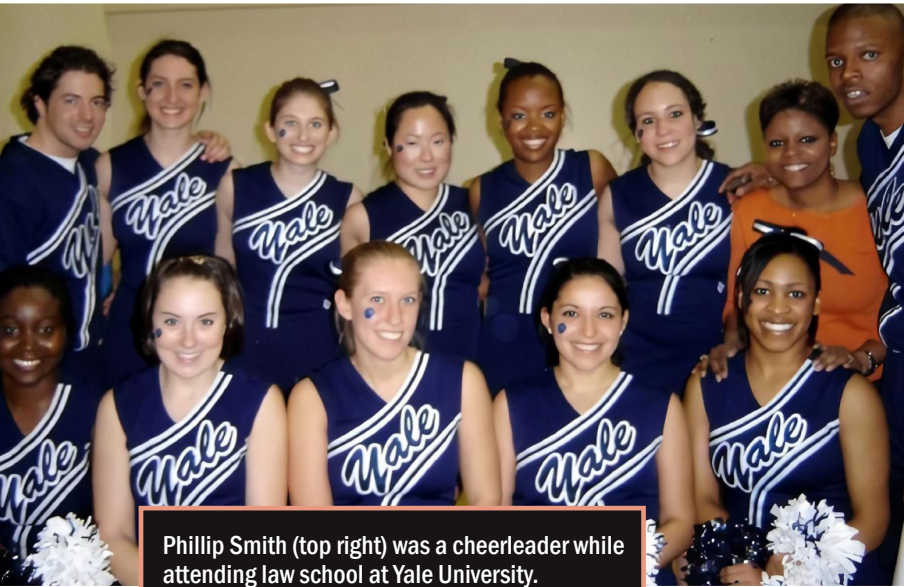
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Meet Phillip Smith



Phillip Smith also serves as a member of the Judge Advocate General's office as a member of the U.S. Navy Reserve.



Phillip Smith (top right) was a cheerleader while attending law school at Yale University.

endeavors, he, like President George W. Bush before him, was a cheerleader for Yale's football team.

Although far from Las Vegas in New Haven, Connecticut, Smith always knew he wanted to return home. As a law student, he summered at various offices in Las Vegas. He envisioned a future in corporate law. However, during his 2L summer, he fell in love with his experience at the Clark County District Attorney's (DA) Office. Upon graduation, he took a job with the Clark County DA. Nine months later, he second-chaired—and helped secure a conviction on—his first murder case.

For the next 15 years, Smith served as a prosecutor – five years at the DA's office followed by 10 years as an assistant U.S. attorney (AUSA) with the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Nevada. Throughout this period, he tried and prosecuted various cases, including violent crimes, firearms, drugs, fraud, sexual assault and homicide. He also successfully tried and prosecuted federal RICO and white-collar cases. In one

year alone he tried as many as 14 cases.

"Mr. Smith was a fearless, zealous, and dedicated public servant. His love of the law was always evident when he presented his cases, whether to the court or to the jury. His litigation and persuasion skills are second to none," said the Honorable Cristina Silva, who worked closely with Smith and tried cases with him at the U.S. Attorney's Office.

During his time as an AUSA, Smith also served as the coordinator for the Project Safe Neighborhoods program. With the program, he had two roles. First, he endeavored to reduce crime by prosecuting repeat, violent offenders for federal gun crimes. Second, he focused on prevention, reentry and community engagement to help achieve lasting reductions in violent crime. As part of his prevention initiatives, Smith took weekly trips to an elementary school to talk to children about the benefits of higher education, and how to avoid drugs and gang activity. In recognition of his tireless efforts as an AUSA and his performance in a high-profile trial,

the U.S. Department of Justice honored him with its "Director's Award," which recognizes the nation's best federal prosecutors, for Superior Performance as an AUSA in 2014.

In 2019, with nearly 60 criminal trials under his belt, Smith opted to try his hand in private practice. He joined Weinberg, Wheeler, Hudgins, Gunn & Dial (WWHGD), one of Las Vegas's leading civil trial firms. That brings us back to the start—Phillip's opening statement, three months into his tenure with WWHGD. The result? An outright defense verdict for his firm's client.

Shortly before joining WWHGD, Smith felt a calling to serve his country again, this time in the U.S. Navy Reserve as a Judge Advocate General's Corps officer. He completed officer candidate school and then Naval Justice School in Rhode Island. Now, he actively handles matters as a Judge Advocate General officer. He also represents clients pro bono through Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada's Children's Attorney Project and Nevada Legal Services.

When not serving his country, community, or clients, Smith enjoys playing softball, riding his motorcycle, or hanging out on his boat – he is a sailor, after all!