

Judicial Profile: Presiding over a Veterans Treatment Court Isn't Just a Job; It's an Adventure for Judge Bronson

By Stacy Sellek
MSC Public Information Office

Judge Terrence P. Bronson could have commanded a naval ship.

Trained as a Surface Warfare Officer to maintain and operate naval vessels, Judge Bronson was technically qualified by the United State Navy to command a ship, although he never did so.

He did, however, oversee several crisis shipping operational exercises to assist commercial shipping fleets in navigating areas of conflict around the globe, and served as a qualified instructor in ship handling and navigating.

Now, after retiring in 2001 from service as a Captain in the Naval Reserves, Judge Bronson navigates an entirely different kind of “ship” as Presiding Judge of the Monroe County Veterans Treatment Court in the 1st District Court.

“It started with people approaching me about the need for a local veterans treatment court, including one local attorney who is also a veteran,” he explained.

He received input from other judges, attorneys and law enforcement officers, and visited veterans treatment courts (VTC) in Redford, East Lansing and Ann Arbor to observe how they operated. Judge Bronson said he felt compelled to pursue the VTC model.

“During my service, I saw a lot of people affected by what they had to do, so I can obviously empathize with these individuals,” he shared. “People sometimes ask why veterans deserve this treatment, and I say, ‘Because they give their lives.’”

His team—including a prosecutor who is an Army veteran, veterans justice outreach coordinator, defense attorney, probation officer—meets monthly. Participants also meet regularly with volunteer mentors, and have periodic check-ins with the court.



Judge Terrence Bronson



Wearing his Navy “whites.”

“There are times when I feel the need to address people in veterans court as a C.O. instead of a judge,” he said. “It’s a different way of handling things, but participants respond well because it’s a language they understand.”

After earning his law degree from Cooley Law School, he was elected to the bench in 1988. Judge Bronson, whose father was also a Navy veteran and served in WWII, decided to follow his naval career with a judicial career because he liked settling disputes and said he “had the temperament for it.”

Judge Bronson believes in firmly taking charge in the court, but as politely and fairly as possible.

One of his early mentors, a family friend who was a judge, advised him: “It’s not your courtroom; it belongs to litigants and their attorneys. Make a decision, be there for them, and do your best.”

It is an approach that he has followed throughout his career.

“As an attorney, I made mental notes of how was I treated in front of judges and how I wanted to be treated,” he said.

Since it became operational in August 2014, the MCVTC has graduated two veterans, and currently has 20 participants.



Judge Bronson's courtroom displays flags to represent each military branch of service.

“When you have a positive response and progress, it’s a really good feeling,” he remarked.

“I want the court to be a resource for individuals who are suffering from service-related maladies. My goal is to be available for as many people as possible in our county and nearby counties,” he added.

When he isn’t working, Judge Bronson enjoys reading, building wine-cork bulletin boards, and playing the flute. He has been married for 42 years to Loretta (“Lorie”), a former nurse who now works as a pastoral associate and hospital chaplain. They have five children.