



SERBIAN-SPEAKING INTERN

Lives History

RECENT SOUTH TEXAS

College of Law graduate **Brian Roberts** lived with his grandparents in Belgrade when he was a child. “I learned to speak Serbian first, then picked up English in kindergarten,” he said. Roberts’ fluency in Serbian proved invaluable this past year when he interned at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague.

He arrived in the Netherlands on Dec. 31, 2002, and went to work reading documents and transcripts, reviewing war diaries, and helping prepare the defense of Radoslav Brdjanin, president of the Serbian Autonomous Region of Krajina.

Interns rarely go to court, and never do so in an official capacity. Yet on Feb. 24, John Ackerman, the Texas-based lawyer representing Brdjanin, asked Roberts to sit in the co-counsel chair.

Roberts passed through two U.N. security checkpoints, donned the requisite black robe, and took a seat with Ackerman before the three tribunal judges.

Roberts’ name was read into the official record as representing the defense. Then witnesses were brought in and seated behind five-inch-thick, explosive-proof glass. They testified in Serbian, and Roberts’ assignment was to simultaneously listen to the witness, listen to the English translator, and read the English transcript to make sure the testimony was properly translated and transcribed.

“The transcript becomes the official record,” Roberts said. “Little mistakes can make a big difference.” Roberts caught three mistakes during his five days in the co-counsel chair. On each occasion, he alerted Ackerman, who rose to object to the trans-

lation, and the witness was asked to restate or clarify.

“The ICTY does not have many safeguards for individuals,” Roberts said. “They admit all evidence and say, ‘We’ll sort it out later.’ The prosecution can poison the well with irrelevant and unreliable evidence.”

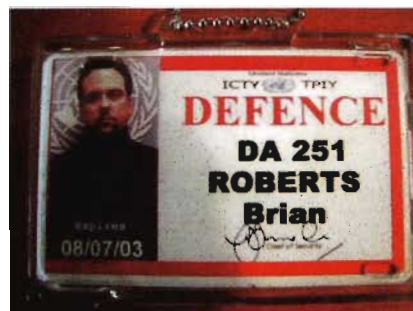
Roberts said attorneys for the defense at the tribunal are not treated as well as those for the prosecution. “The prosecution gets paid on a regular basis and has teams of people to work on every aspect,” he said. “Not so with the defense, which is limited in resources, staff, and billable hours. I spoke with a defense attorney in mid-April who still had not been paid for time he billed in November.”

Roberts marveled at his experiences in The Hague.

“There have not been tribunals since Nuremberg, and to think I was a part of this one,” he said. “I couldn’t believe the places I was allowed to go and the people I got to meet. I had drinks with Milosovic’s attorneys!”

Roberts returned from The Hague in time to graduate with his law class on May 24. (Law is a second career for the 35-year-old, who holds an M.B.A. and worked for 12 years in financial sales.)

This month, he starts work as an assistant district attorney in Harris County. This month also marks the beginning of the defense presenta-



tion in the Radoslav Brdjanin trial, which began in January 2002. Roberts intends to wake up early, on occasion, and stream video from the trial at www.un.org/icty.