

This Week at VA

Episode #14

Christian Benedetto-Marine Corps Veteran, PTSD Journal

Hosted by Tim Lawson

(Text Transcript Follows)

[00:00:00] PSA:

Man 1: The VA has made it extremely easy to access information, to get out there and find benefits that are there for you.

Woman 1: Veteran's might be eligible for things they had no idea they're eligible for. No matter what age you are.

Man 2: That's your benefit, that's what you earned. Take advantage of it.

Man 3: And the only reason I am sitting here today, talking to anybody is because of the VA.

Man 1: Explore the many ways VA benefits can help you purchase a home, earn a degree, advance your career, and so much more. Learn about VA benefits you may be eligible for. Visit [explore.va.gov](https://www.va.gov/explore) today.

[00:00:37] Music

[00:00:47] OPENING MONOLOGUE:

Timothy Lawson (TL): Good Morning everybody! I am Timothy Lawson your host for This Week at VA. This is episode 14 and today is Thursday, January 19. Now I know we typically release episodes on Friday but because of the inauguration today we do not want to get in the way or get lost in the mix of the news that will surely be coming out today covering that event as we are releasing a day early. You will also notice you will get the This Week newsletter today as well. Today's feature interview is with Christian Benedetto. He is the founder of a magazine called PTSD Journal. We'll hear from him. We'll hear about resources that he uses in VA. But first, I wanna tell you about [explore.va.gov](https://www.va.gov/explore). If you go there you

can get lots of information regarding education benefits, health benefits, disability compensation, memorial benefits, pensions, home loans, life insurance, employment services, and there's even information there for spouses, dependents, and survivors. So, if you are new to any of those, or maybe you didn't even know that those were available through VA, you can go to [explore.va.gov](https://www.explore.va.gov) and find information there regarding those things. So, Christian Benedetto, Marine Corps Veteran that served in the First Gulf War. He got out of the military, struggled with his transition like so many veterans do, ended up when he learned about when he learned that he had PTSD, realized that there was no reading material on PTSD. That there wasn't any publication that he could go to to learn more about what he's experiencing, find others that are experiencing the same thing, and so he founded the PTSD Journal, which is the publication that features veterans that discuss such topics. And you can possibly find it in your local VA, as they distribute to some facilities and you can also hit him up as he'll mention in the interview to receive your own copy if you're interested in the journal. But, without further ado, here's Christian Benedetto. Enjoy.

[00:02:53] Music

[00:02:57] INTERVIEW:

TL: Alright, Christian Benedetto Jr. We got a number of people that emailed us a couple months ago that were nominating you for Veteran of the Day, that we do daily on the VA social media. And I did a little research on you and I thought you would make a good podcast guest. I was really excited that you agreed to come on, so thank you for taking the time to do this.

Christian Benedetto (CB): Thank you for having me.

TL: Christian, we start every discussion, conversation, interview with the one thing that so many of us have in common and that's the decision to join the United States military. Tell us about that decision for you.

CB:

Sure, I always wanted to be a Marine. From the time I was a small child. As a matter of fact, I, when I was in high school, I tried to join the reserves but their boot camp at that time was about 16 weeks and I didn't have 16 weeks off for high school. I grew up in a very ethnic, Italian family. The rule of thumb of sort of grandkids of immigrants, my parents grew up very poor, was you went to college. And then after college, you could do whatever you wanted to. My father used to say you get a four-year degree in four years, and be a garbage man, but be a well-educated garbage man. So, graduated from college and then I decided I wanted to serve my country. I got an uncle, a great uncle who just passed away, Joseph Finello, Uncle Bucky. Who was in Korea with Chesty Puller in the first brigade. And he was definitely the patriarch of our family. Had, just you know, a very, you know, larger than life guy. And I idolized him. He was my, like a second father. I mean my father was my hero. And it was never a doubt. You know he used to tell me 'You know you're going to live to be 80, you know, spend four years, you know, serving your country'. And it just made, you know, sense, you know, for me and to me. Then I graduated college and I missed the window for OCS because back then there weren't as many, you know, slots because it was sort of a peacetime, for a lack of a better phrase. So, I had about a 18-month window if I wanted to go to OCS, so I talked to my uncle and he said 'Enlist. If you're going to be a career officer being mustang would be much better off and if you're not going to be a career officer than being enlisted would be much better off'. So, I enlisted in the Marine Corps with a four-year college degree. Cause I wanted to see the world and I wanted to serve my country. And it was a great experience. I grew up, I guess sheltered would be the word. My parents, very kind loving household, but I didn't see people of different demographics, different ethnicities. You know, I grew up, I went to Catholic grammar school and Catholic high school, all boys, taught by brothers. You know, diversity was, you weren't Irish and Catholic, you weren't Italian and Catholic, or you weren't Polish and Catholic, I don't think, I just didn't meet a lot of people that weren't from my small little world and that changed a tiny little bit when I went to college, but not much. I went in the Marine Corps and it changed a whole lot and I was actually pretty active. I had friends of all colors, shapes, and sizes in the Marine Corps. I'll never forget, I had a roommate, Tracy Burton, and he happened to be African American. He was dark green Marine, and he

was playing basketball with a bunch of friends and I come back from a run and I was drinking a giant Gatorade and I asked him if he wanted some and he said sure. He came off the court, he took a big giant swig of it, and then handed it back to me, and I took a swig of it, and all of his friends who happened to be dark green Marines, said 'Are you all right?' and I said 'Why is that?' and he said 'You didn't even wipe it before you drank from it.' And I said, 'Why would I do that?' and I didn't even realize that there was that much of a racial divide and you know, I sat with light green Marines, dark green Marines, and it just seemed right. You know, stood shoulder to shoulder and fought in the first Gulf War with people of every ethnicity, so why should anybody be treated any different?

TL: Yeah. What was your occupation, your MOS in the Marine Corp?

CB: Ah O351, which is assault men, at the time it was dragon gunner. Now it's, you know, still called assault men, but I don't think they use dragons anymore.

TL: Yeah.

CB: New version of it. For twenty-something years, 25 years.

TL: Sure. What was the years of your enlistment?

CB: Ah I enlisted in '89, went in in '90 and then got out in '94. I extended for nine months, I had gotten orders to Quantico to be a marksmanship instructor but the only way I could do that is if I extended for nine months, or I could go to Korea for a year. So, I ah extended for nine months at the advice of my first sergeant. My orders came in and they said, 'Paris Island Marksmanship Instructor'. I said, 'First sergeant, you know, I'm supposed to go to, you know, Quantico, be closer to home, blab la bla' and he goes 'Well if you want we could send you to Korea for 22 months'. So, I said 'Paris Island sounds about right to me'.

TL: [laughter]

CB: I'll go to Paris Island. And it worked out really well because I ended up being able to go to graduate school. I mean, it was crazy. I went to grad school, 84 miles each way, four nights a week and every Saturday. So two nights a week, mathematically, I could only sleep for two hours and 15 minutes because class got out at you know, ten and then I'd drive 84 miles, I had to get out, you know, to the field day and everything else and PT and the rifle range, it gets hot at 5:30 in the morning so you know, PT could be at 3:30.

TL: Yeah.

CB: But it was a great experience, you know, served with some tremendous Marines. I was in, right at a cusp of time where, we jumped around about, you know. What years were you in?

TL: Ah 2006, 2011.

CB: So, the big thing was, we actually, the Marine Corps was the last branch of the service to get name tags on your camis.

TL: Yeah.

CB: Like, the biggest like, 'Oh my God, you know, like what are they doing to us. They're going to make us like the Army, or this that and the other thing'.'

TL: So, tell us about your transition out. I know you said you had some injuries you were dealing with, but what was your decision to discharge finally come down to?

CB: Um I had three surgeries in about 13 months both knees and my left elbow, and a couple of other, you know, minor injuries. So, you know, when you're, and after the Gulf War, you know, they started to draw down on the Marine Corps, so I had you know, I had perfect proficiency and conduct marks, you know truly. But, you know, my knees were shot, my elbow was shoot, my lower back was fried. So, I decided it was just time to get out. Just because I had, I had seen enough. 27-year-old,

you know, gunnery sergeants, that you know, after three cups of coffee, six cigarettes, you know, they just, you know, had chewed on Motrin all day, so I was smart enough to read the writing on the wall.

TL: Yeah.

CB: I wanted to get on and you know, and actually have a life of public service. Believe it or not, I actually wanted to be a politician.

TL: Is there a story or experience or memory that you have from your time in that sort of sums up your service?

CB: You know, there, there is. There is, he's a retired colonel now, but at the time he was a major. When I served with him in the Gulf War, it was, his name is Stephan Davis, now he's retired colonel Stephan Davis, he was captain in second battalion fourth Marines, golf company. During the Gulf War, I was in weapons company, assigned to fox company, but I knew him and then when I went to Paris Island, he became the S3 officer and um he said to me 'You know Corp Benedetto, you know the best part about being a former Marine?' I said, 'What's that Sir?' and he said, 'You're tough as nails, you can get through anything.' 'That's good to know Sir', I said, 'You can accomplish anything you want'. He said, 'Nothing bothers you. [Laughter] I said, 'That's great'. He goes, 'You know the worst part about being a former Marine?' I said, 'No Sir, what's that?' He said, 'You're tough as nails. Nothing bothers you. You can get through anything'. So, I think that kind of put it in perspective, where you know, I look at problems and I'll talk about that with the magazine a little bit. And you know, I don't, I really just still don't believe that anything isn't achievable, in my life or in you know and my life is a little wacky, you know, I have PTSD and crime fatigue syndrome and fibromyalgia, and you know, a bad back, and bad knees, and a kidney problem, the list goes, the list goes on. But you know, I think it taught me to just never give up, there's always another way. I tell the story all the time, 'You know how many Marines you can fit in a Humvee or a Jeep? One more.'

TL: [Laughter]

CB: Doesn't matter. There is always room for one more Marine. As a matter of fact, I just got an email connection today with a friend of mine who owns a restaurant, whose son is getting out of the Marine Corp this week and he doesn't know what he's going to do. And I said, 'Tell the cashier to have her son call me and we'll find him a job.' I don't know what his MOS was, I don't know anything, I just know he is a Marine Corporal, he served, you know, two tours overseas, and you know, we'll help him however we can. I tell people when I do interviews all the time, 'My cell phone number is (732) 241-8887 if you are a Veteran or a family member of a Veteran and you need help, call my cell phone, preferably after 05, and before 11 p.m. you know, seven days a week. But if you've got to call me at 4 a.m., call me at 4 a.m. and I might, maybe, I don't know that I'm gonna write you a check but definitely am going to take the time, listen to you, or call you back if you get my voicemail and figure out, you know, how to get you some help. Whether you need diapers for your kid, or a job, or whatever it is.' We are all in this together.

TL: Yeah. Tell us, so after your transition out, did you experience any sorta emotional crisis?

CB: Yeah, my transition was disastrous. [Laughter] And I say that in a little bit of tongue in cheek. You know, it's very difficult to go from, and you experienced it, you know, you're the baddest, you know, mother f'er on the planet, and now drive 55 miles an hour when you get on the highway and don't do any crazy stuff. So, you know, I drank too much, I'm a recovering alcoholic, and you know, long story short. But I went into sales, which was, which really, I thought, masked it really well. Because you know, it was the mid 90's so you know, young sales guy, so I was the guy that took people out to bars and played golf, and you know, went to casinos and poker games and that kind of thing. So, you know it was just that like fun loving, 'eh, he's a former Marine' you know, war Veteran, you know, cut him some slack. I was very good at sales, I'm good with people, so I kind of hid it. And then bout 06', you know, almost 20 years later, in my late 30's I suddenly realized life had consequences, it did not really occur to me until that point. So, I slowed my drinking down, and I met somebody and got married you know, pretty quickly. We had a baby. Our son, who is going on nine, great kid,

smart kid, happy kid, athletic kid, adjusted to the divorce very well. I see him a lot, I live five miles away from him, six miles away from him. And, you know, that's when I realized, when I found out that my now ex-wife was pregnant, that's really when I made the decision to stop drinking. And you know, I mean, I drank twice after that, but it was out with big clients, so you know like they're buying me drinks blab bla bla. And I'm kind of spitting them back into the bottle or pouring out my beer in the bathroom.

TL: [Laughter]

CB: And try and hide it because I wasn't really ready for that. And then, I had fallen off the wagon, you know, twice since then, but nothing you know, nothing off the rails or anything. And I go to AA and I'm sponsored, and you know, so, you know, what happened for me that really made me get help was 2013 and my son was about five and it was late October, early November. And he kind of crawled into bed with my wife and I on a Saturday morning, you know, I just kind of turned my back because you know, I have a lot of nightmares and I flinch a lot. I kind of rolled over and you know, it was like 6 o'clock in the morning and he just moved his hand in a real weird way and I just grabbed his hand really hard because I didn't know what was going on. And I scared him more than he, I scared myself more than I scared him. He still to this day doesn't even remember it. So, you know, I went to the VA, started calling the VA on Monday, and I had had some previously bad experiences. Because you know, the VA today is much better than it was 15-20 years ago. You know, where you'd show up for an appointment and they say, and they'd call and confirm the appointment on a Tuesday for a Wednesday, you'd show up on Wednesday and they'd have no record that you had an appointment. You're like, 'I have a letter and I have a phone call', and they're like, 'yeah, sorry'. So, you know, and I knew, you know, something was wrong, and you know, deep down. I mean I came home from the Gulf War, my parents had a huge party for me, I'll never forget this. My father came over, he was a gentle guy and he walked over and he said, he put his hand on my shoulder, and said, 'Are you okay?' and I said, 'Yeah, I think so, why?' and he goes, 'Well, you got a 100 people here,

there's five bathrooms inside, you've got all your aunts and grandmother here, and you're pissing in my flower bed...'

TL: [Laughter]

CB: '...in front of everybody.' and I hadn't been inside of a building in 100 something days, other than for like the two days, 'cause I left camp 13 in Saudi Arabia, where we came in you know, we were there for like one and a half nights sleeping indoors, and then got on a plane, and then was home. So, I was just so used to just, you know, walking fifty feet and just you know, taking a leak, or digging a hole and you know, and using the bathroom, making a head call. So, I knew when I couldn't sleep, and I literally dug a fighting position in the flower bed and the edge of my parents' property back against the fence line. I slept in a dirt hole for a couple days, was easier. Then I'd sleep on their deck, in a lawn chair, outside, just cause I felt claustrophobic but to me, I just thought I needed to decompress, so I drank a lot those last couple years, well I drank a lot, you know, when I was in the Marine Corps, I was not, I was a drinker before that, but nothing crazy. So, you know, fast forward, I went to the VA and they were helpful, but not as helpful as I really thought I needed. So, I went to the DAV which I had been a life member of and they set me straight. They said, 'Here's what you need to do. Here's this form, that form, this form, that form. You can go see a civilian doctor.' And I really lucked out. I saw my civilian doctor, who's retired now, David Learner, and he was in the Navy as a doctor during Vietnam, and he was one of two people who did not, in his class in medical school, for the Navy, that did not go to Vietnam. But he had a lot of friends who did. And he really, you know, he understood what was going on. And he recommended me to a guy, Doctor Phil Warner, who's an Army officer, medical doctor in Vietnam, who had served and seen some pretty nasty things and came back from Vietnam and said, 'I can't be a medical doctor anymore', and became a psychiatrist. He was nine miles from my house and really you know, helped me understand, you know, my PTSD, and my triggers, and that kind of and I still have triggers, I don't like crowds and I don't like to go to the movies, but at least I can control them and you know, and I take my meds and I stopped drinking, and you know, I go to, you know, therapy and I go to AA. So, you know, I was on my road to recovery. And in that, you know,

sort of being a geek by trade, you know, I have a day job for a lack of a better phrase. I own a commercial real estate brokerage company and buy some publicly traded companies that are household names, and I have a good friend, Vick Nichols. And Vick's been in the magazine business forever. I said Vick, I used to send him, you know, business, and said, 'Vick can we have breakfast?' and he said, 'Sure, absolutely.' And I think he just thought it was gonna be the, you know, once a year, twice a year, you know, how you've been, what's going on, you know, kind of thing and I said, 'I have an idea for a magazine' and I watched him roll his eyes and sigh. I said, 'Vick, I understand that 7-8,000 magazines a year fail. And I understand JFK Jr. couldn't make a magazine work. But I have an idea.', so he said, 'Please give it to me.' So, I said, 'There's no magazine on PTSD. There's like 30 magazines on plumbing fixtures. You know, I have PTSD, I'm finally admitting it and I'm just trying to get, like the nexus Lexus on where I can understand it, you know, and how I can get better.' And he thought about it and Vick's, I didn't know, Vick's father was a Marine in Korea and an African American on top of everything else. So, he had some of those issues going on when the Marine Corp was not as kind and gentle and sensitive as it might have been at the time. So, we thought about it, and we started doing some quick research, and there was no magazines. And his next meeting after me happened to be with Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey for one of his other magazines. And he asked the women that he had known for a long time, of what she thought about a magazine about PTSD and she got quiet. And she said, 'Well tell me, what you guys are thinking?' and then you know, she kind of cheered up a little bit and said, 'You know Vick, I have PTSD.' and he said 'What? I would never have known.' And she said, 'Yeah, I got diagnosed a few years ago.' So, we were kind of off to the races and Vick has a good friend, David Cummings, who's our editor, who is a former ESPN guy, ran their magazine, deputy editor of their magazine. So, they come into my office for this meeting, so I just laugh because we always tell this story. So, Dave comes in, he's a very serious journalist, you know, in the sports world. I mean, just, you know, knows all the NFL and every owner of every major sports team, every, you know it was everybody. So, he says, it was like an hour and 45-minute interview and, all my questions are like, you know, like general poindexter. Like, I'm not sure, I don't know, I'm not sure. And then he says, 'Well do you have any

magazine experience?’ and I said ‘No’. He says, ‘Well have you ever run any kind of publication before?’ ‘No’. You know, ‘How much money do you have for the magazine?’ and I go, ‘How much do I need?’ and he says, ‘Two million dollars’ and I go, you know, ‘I think we could put together like 50,000 dollars.’ And so, he finally just starts laughing and I go ‘What’s wrong?’ and he goes, ‘Can I ask you a serious question?’ I said, ‘Yes’. He says, ‘You seem like a really nice guy and committed’. He said, ‘Why in the name of anything Holy, would you think in a declining market where everything is going digital that you could make this work with no experience, no money, and not a full-time staff?’ I happened to pull up my right sleeve, where I have an eagle, globe, and anchor. And I said, ‘David do you know what this is?’ and he said, ‘That’s the Marine, that’s the eagle, globe, and anchor, that’s the Marine Corp.’ and I go, ‘Yeah. You know men like me, wore this same exact one at the Iwo Jima and they worked it out’. I said, ‘I’ll figure it out’ and every time, so I said, ‘You’re going to go home to your wife and tell her this.’ before I showed him the Eagle, and sure enough he did. He went home, talked to his wife, and took, and came on board. Every time we’ve come to a hurdle, and everyone thought okay, man we’re just well over our head, I said, you know, ‘Nobody’s shooting at us. It’s a good day, you know, what do we need? You know, give me 24 hours to think about it.’ We needed a digital manager for our digital content, and that was three grand a month. We didn’t have 3,000 in the budget and I said, ‘I’ll find somebody’. So, I sent some writing samples in of somebody and said, ‘They’ll do this job for 500 dollars a month as a favor to me.’ And they’re like, ‘What? They’re fantastic!’ and we hired them. That’s Amy Glenn, she’s out of San Diego. You know she does a phenomenal, phenomenal job. She’s a recent college graduate and she just, you know, got it. And then I kind of trained my whole life for this, where our current cover, as you may have seen, is Sergeant Ennis, who is the Marine Aviator, who she was crew chief, who was shot down in Afghanistan, told she would never walk again, and then less than a year or so later walked across Britain with Prince Harry with “Walking with the Wounded” and I think our cover, I’ll read it, it says, ‘Meet Sergeant Kirstie Ennis, the Marine who told Prince Harry to toughen up’. The story goes that he was complaining about, Prince Harry was complaining about his knees after, you know, a couple days of walking, and, you know, she kind of grabbed him by the collar and maybe

there's hyperbole in here, but I've heard different stories of it, and said, 'You want to see what a knee looks like?' and three weeks after she finished the walk she had to have her leg amputated cause it was in such bad shape. So anyway, she has this connection to Prince Harry now we have his father in Australia trying to work with us. I did a movie with Billy Bob Thornton called "Iron Will" with a company called Wag Tree, and they just kind of found us. So, we've really become this nexus Lexus, you know for PTSD, we're coming out with a list of the top 25, well not the top, but 25 influential people in the world of PTSD, which is just amazing. You know Prudential and the New Jersey Devils honored me as the "Hometown Hero" on November 12th at their home game, right after Veteran's Day, that was a surreal experience. I was on the Jumbotron, I was on live TV. You know 18,000 people giving me a standing ovation. I don't like crowds and I had enough (inaudible), probably to knock over a small water buffalo but that's alright. You know part of its healthcare, largest healthcare organization in New Jersey, has really just embraced us and wrapped their arms around us. The Langdon school, medical school, and NYU, same exact thing, you know, like how can we help? We've never had a person that we've met with that said, 'This is a bad idea.' Even at the VA, you know, we distribute to a bunch of VA's and I always tell the story of somebody found out that I was the founder of the magazine and I was there with my social worker, a guy named Dan Pritzer, who is just really an instrumental help in my life on every aspect and Dan introduced me to this guy. And the guy picked me up, and I'm like two, you've never met me, but I'm like 5' 10", like you know, 255, so I'm not a little guy. And this guy picked me up and my feet were dangling, it was a Vietnam Vet, he had to be about 70 years old, and just hugged me, and I could see the tears in his eyes. And he's like, 'Man, this magazine, just you know, it just legitimizes us.' And we've got so many people, I mean, on Facebook depending on the week, we get about 1.8 million, you know, people on our Facebook page, that's one like every 2.7 seconds. It's just insane, how well people have come back and, you know, embraced it, you know, amazing.

TL:

Yeah. So how many total issues do you have circulating on any given release?

CB: Well we do three things. We have hard copies then we have two different versions of digi-mag on the magazine and then we have something called 'Book crammer' (*unclear on word*). But our readership and you can't do, read one more issue out before they can do an audit, but over, about 300 thousand.

TL: Okay. You told a great story about the Vietnam Vet that picked you up but share maybe a moment where and maybe that was it, but like a moment where you realized, like man, this is like we really are making an impact here.

CB: Sure. We post a ton of memes. We learned how to put memes up and I put up a meme with the VA 800 number for the suicide hotline, and somebody posted, actually, they reached out for us and said, 'I sent this to a friend of mine and it saved his life last night.'

TL: That's awesome.

CB: So, I mean, and we get those all the time, you know, whether it's the intimate or thankful or people say, 'This is me and I've always felt alone'. And so you know it's therapeutic for me in a lot of ways, but in a lot of ways, you know, it doesn't help me either because you know, I don't ever really get a chance to not think about my own PTSD because I'll you know, I'll get up anywhere from three to seven times a night with nightmares, I don't sleep a lot. And you know, I'll get up, and you know, I'll start thinking about somebody else's problems. Like you know, I think Sergeant Ennis, tells a great story, it's on her Facebook page. She was getting a, she had an infection, she had a below the knee amputation and then it got infected, so they had to go above the knee, and then when they did the saw cut above the knee, it was just at a weird angle and the bone started sticking through. She was supposed to be in the Invictus games and couldn't compete because of the infection and the setback. You know, I have my pet peeves when people say, 'Oh, can't you just get over it?' I'm like, 'Yeah, no, I can't.' You know, I can take myself out of situations, where I know, you know, it's going to trigger me, you know, like fireworks scare the crap out of me, the smell of sulfur. So, I try to go to the mountains, you know up to like the middle of nowhere Vermont, where, you know, to tiny little

towns where there's 200 people and I'm three miles from the road, you know, during 4th of July if I can. You know. But you know, or at least I know if I'm going to watch fireworks, you know, I might take a little something extra for anxiety and keep my windows shut and watch them, you know, so I don't smell the sulfur or be so far away. At least if I know they're coming, I can kind of put myself in a mode as opposed to be walking down the street and some kid you know, lights an M-80, you know, and next thing I know, you know, I'm diving behind a dumpster.

TL: So, are you regularly using the VA right now?

CB: Very much so.

TL: Which medical center do you receive your care at?

CB: East Orange.

TL: You know, why do you continue going to VA? What is it about the VA that you continue to, you know, commit to your healthcare for?

CB: Well I have private medical insurance also. But I do use the VA because I'm 80% disabled, soon to go to 90 and I think I'll eventually get to 100. So, but they have my whole entire file there, you know. So, and I don't have to explain, you know, like I go to the VA like I've been to the emergency room twice, once for kidney stones recently. But if you go to the emergency room, you know, they have your whole file, and you say, 'I have PTSD', they don't, they take it seriously. And they go, 'Okay so like' and I have a really bad gag reflex from wearing gas masks during the Gulf War in mock gear so if I say to the doctor, 'I have a really bad gag you know, please don't stick the presser down my throat because I'm going to gag or you know, end up grabbing your wrist or something that we're all not going to be happy with.' So, they get it, they understand it. You know, there's two types of people at the VA and that's people that are just salt of the Earth, that's people that couldn't be better, and people that are just really punching their time clock and you know, I've noticed a shift since 2013 that there's probably like 70-80% of the people there really are you know, really care. And there's some people that, you know, I mean that I'm not happy with that are

there. And some of them work in the lunchroom and some of them you know are doctors. There's a big standing joke at the VA that's like you know, 'Ortho, there's a huge line for ortho, because so many people have problems', but they'll say like 'but if you ever get cancer, man we're really good at cancer.'

TL: [Laughter]

CB: You know, so I'm like, 'Hey thanks guys.' But the PTSD department there is phenomenal, Doctor Martín, who handles my meds and Dan Pritzer is my social worker, you know, my psychologist. You know, they've stepped to the plate, you know, when I was going through divorce. At the end of the day, you know, I'm very passionate about, you know, Veteran's rights. Not just PTSD, but just, you know, in general. So, the VA you know, it has its pitfalls. But you know, I mean it's funny, I was at, having my eyes tested, I had an 8 o'clock appointment and I was online to swipe my card and the guy came up, he's trying to convince the ladies at the counter, even though it said nine, he had an eight o'clock appointment and she said, 'No sir, it says nine right here. It says nine in the book, you have a nine o'clock, you know, you'll get seen today.' and he said 'Well, you know, it's really eight.' and she said 'Look, you go to the regular doctor. You have an eight o'clock appointment. Do they see you right at eight o'clock?' And some people have never been to a regular doctor, they always use the VA. So, there's a misconception that the VA has, gets a bad rep because they might see you twenty minutes late, well you know I've been to my regular family physician and waited an hour, and I've been to my private ortho and waited an hour and 45 minutes after my appointment. So that's just medicine, that has nothing to do with, you know, with anything else. The VA is getting better on a daily basis. I mean I think of the fact, and I don't know if you go to the VA or not, but you used to have to if you wanted a reimbursement for driving, you'd have to go in, fill out a form, wait online, and get your nine dollars. And often, it was, I just look at the line and if the line was long I wouldn't go. But now you can do it right on one of the machines. Right after you've had your appointment, you just click a button, you know 'Do you still live at this address?' enter your information and they mail you a check and you get a check, you know, anywhere from, you know, 10-15 days

later for that reimbursement. That's like the easiest thing in the world and it doesn't sound like much, but you know if you go to the VA, you know two-three times a month, especially if you know you go to group therapy, and you go to a psychologist or psychiatrist once a month, and then you have some kind of trauma or medical issue, you know, that 3-500 dollars a month, you know, to a lot of people, I'm sorry a year when you add it up, and then if the VA can provide you your prescriptions, you know it can save you another 6 or 700 dollars so you know, I think people really need to understand, there's a lot of benefits they don't use, so I've started using, all my prescriptions go through the VA.

TL: Christian, if someone is sort of resonating with what you're talking about here and, you know, they have been diagnosed with PTSD or know someone that is or may be, you know, experiencing that and is interested in the PTSD Journal, what is the easiest way for someone to get a copy or to read the material?

CB: If you go to our website, www.PTSDJournal.com, all the copies are available digitally. If you email us, where there's a form. And you want two copies or five copies, we'll mail it to you for free. And we have distribution in about 10 VA facilities, depending on where they are. Like East Orange can't keep them on shelves, so I'm always, we ship them copies and then we bring them outward. Or they can go to our Facebook page and message us, we'll send them a copy, we send them copies for free all the time anywhere and everywhere. It's a labor of love you know, we've all, you know, our team is great. We've actually, DAV is now a sponsor of ours and we're working on the VA as well to buy copies of the magazine to distribute in the hospitals, as well as looking for corporations to pay for, you know, we'd love to send 10,000 copies to Walter Reed a quarter. Matter of fact, our next issue comes out in March and we have Miss USA, who happens to be an Army Reserve, Army second lieutenant, and who has PTSD I believe. And PTSD is a big cause of hers on her platform, so, you know, we're happy to get people copies and we've run into, you know, ran into a problem where somebody wanted a lot of copies and it was going to be, you know, a big chunk of money, and, you know, we're like 'oh my God. You know we're a startup, you know, what are we going to do?' I made a

phone call and some people wrote checks, so we could buy more copies and ship them to a nonprofit. My advice to anybody with PTSD is you know, try and learn how to breathe. It sounds silly, whether it's meditation or yoga, or just, you know, a simple or even, you know, a therapist's office. But when you are having a panic attack, a panic attack at two o'clock in the morning, or two o'clock in the afternoon at work, if you can find a quiet place and learn how to breathe, that panic attack may only last seven minutes, not, you know, seven hours. And it may last seven hours anyway but you know, so we're trying to take the stigma, you know, out of it. That's why I'm, you know, I'm always happy to talk about it. And say, you know, I have PTSD and you know, I run a company, and you know, I'm in a quasi-successful and yeah, you know I mean do I, you know, eat at the same restaurants and do I, you know, do have the same seat in my conference room and, you know, do I like my back to the wall and you know do I go recon if I have a meeting at a new location, will I get there three hours early and recon it and find out where everything is. When I go out to a seminar every year, I stay at the same hotel, and they put me in the same room on the same floor because it will put me at ease? Sure, absolutely. And I have them take the mini bar out. So, you know, it's just, trying to be you know, smart and practical you know, about it, you know. And then now with eBenefits for the VA, it's make life so much easier to be able to go on and just change something like a dependent or a bank account or that kind of thing where you can do something in like five minutes. That five years ago that would have taken a half a day off work three times. So, I applaud the VA for upgrades on the electronic system.

TL: Yeah. Absolutely. Christian, I really appreciate you talking to me and my audience about your service, your transition now and starting the PTSD Journal and the journey that that's been. And most of all, thank you for your service Sir and sacrifice to our country.

CB: Thank you so much.

[00:43:35] Music

[00:43:40] PSA

Man 1: I served in Vietnam.

Man 2: I served in World War II.

Women 1: I served in Afghanistan.

Man 1: And VA serves us all.

Man 2: No matter when you served.

Women 1: No matter if you saw combat or not.

Man 1: There are benefits for Veterans of every generation.

Women 1: See what VA can do for you.

Male Narrator: To learn what benefits you may be eligible for, visit www.va.gov.

[00:44:06] Music

[00:44:11] CLOSING MONOLOGUE:

TL: So, in the interview, Christian mentions a handful of things that he enjoys or benefits from using his local VA medical center. And usually, at the end of the interview, I sort of pinpoint a resource that was mentioned or that relates that you can use yourself. Today I am going to point out maybe one of the bigger ones but that's just healthcare in general. I know that seems a little broad considering that this is a VA podcast and one of VA's main benefits is healthcare. But I'm willing to bet that there's a number of people listening that qualify for healthcare benefits through that have not received them or even applied for them yet. And if that's you, I highly suggest that you inquire about what benefits you are qualified for and can receive through the VA. So again, if you go to explore.va.gov and click on healthcare, you can get a lot of information there about what healthcare you can qualify for, what the requirements are to qualify for those benefits, the types of care that you can receive, how it works with the Affordable Care Act, and then of course, the eligibility that your spouse, dependents, or survivors may

have. So explore.va.gov, click on healthcare, read up, find out what you qualify for, how you meet those requirements, and then you can apply right there. There's an apply now button, you'll click that, it will bring you to the page you need to be at to be able to apply and you will be on your way. Today's Veteran of the Day is Air Force Veteran George Watson Sr. He is a World War II Veteran and one of the original Tuskegee Airmen. After graduation from high school, he enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps in 1942 and was sent to 332nd Fighter Group and joined the "Red Tails" and their efforts in World War II. He served for 26 years and was assigned to stations such as Germany, England, Turkey, and Iran before finally settling down and retiring at McGuire Air Force Base. And of course, along with the other Tuskegee Airmen, was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal back in 2007. To read George's full write up or to find out how you can submit your own Veteran of the Day, go to blogs.va.gov. Alright everybody thank you so much for listening. I appreciate your time and attention. I know there's a lot of options out there for entertainment and I appreciate you spending your time here with me. Be sure to follow us on all of the social medias. You can search Department of Veteran's Affairs or search DeptVetAffairs on [Instagram](#) [Link to VA Instagram Account] and [Twitter](#) [Link to VA Twitter Account] where we have a handle and of course blogs.va.gov is where you can read more stories from within our community. If you have any questions that you have answered here on the show you can email us at newmedia@va.gov or tweet at us using [#VAPodcast](#) [Link to VA Podcast Twitter feed]. Thank you for listening. I'm Timothy Lawson, signing off.

[00:47:30] Music