

Borne the Battle

Episode # 143

Stephen Holley – Navy SEAL Veteran, Naval Academy Quarterback, Carry the Load Co-founder and CEO

<https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/59611/borne-the-battle-143-stephen-holley-navy-seal-veteran-naval-academy-quarterback-carry-the-load-ceo/>

(Text Transcript Follows)

[00:00:00] Music

[00:00:10] OPENING MONOLOGUE:

Tanner Iskra (TI): Let's get it. May 1, 2019. *Borne the Battle*. Brought to you by the Department of Veterans Affairs. I am your host Marine Corps Veteran Tanner Iskra. Hope everyone had a good week outside of podcast land. If you hear a change in my voice, it's because I am still dealing with allergies. I can't even really hear my true self really, right now. Uh, I'm doing everything I can, taking some honey, doing some allergy meds. Uh, hopefully we can right the ship in the next week or two. Couple, uh, couple things in the email inbox this week. A lot of it was from *BourBiz*. Uh, most of it concerning *BourBiz*, and, thank you for those that met me in person at *BourBiz* that are emailing me. I will get back to your email. Uh, have been in and out because of this aforementioned allergy. Uh, it's-it's killing me. So, once I get back on track, I will be answering those emails. Uh, I did get a pretty good review. Came from squint006, "More than I expected. I enjoyed the first episode I heard, Jennifer Marshall, and look forward to the next, I was expecting a droll, pure information podcast, and this is not it. Thank you for the work you do and look forward to interesting topics." Thank you, squint006, we look forward to bringing you more interesting topics, and if you have an interesting topic that you wanna bring to me, please email me at podcast@va.gov [Link to *Borne the Battle* podcast email]. Let's discuss it, let's talk about it, and see if we can't get it on the show. If you have any questions about anything about the podcast, always feel free to email me, or leave a review. [Theme song from the movie *Spaceballs* playing in the background.] As stated in previous episodes, once we get to 75 ratings and reviews, I'll release a snippet of the Adrian Cronauer, Mel Brooks interview. We are currently at 63 percent and I can't wait 'til we hit 75. At 75, I will release a snippet of the interview between Adrian Cronauer of *Good Morning, Vietnam* and the legendary director, producer Mel Brooks. Uh, this interview was dropped in my lap shortly after I became the host, and I

thought it was a- a good thing to use as ransom, uh, for ratings and reviews because I want to know how better to improve the show or if I'm doing a good job, or- or just let me know. Uhm, once we get to 100 ratings and reviews, I'll release the entire episode. And, it is a, uh, a hidden gem that I can't wait to bring to you, and it's a hidden gem piece of content that I can't wait to bring to you.

[00:02:40] NEWS RELEASE:

(TI): One news release this week. Says, "For immediate release, VA and Cigna partner to help prevent opioid misuse and improve treatment of Veterans with chronic pain. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and Cigna, a global health service company, recently announced a new public private partnership to improve safety and quality of care for Veterans with chronic pain who are at risk for opioid misuse. The partnership, which was formalized March 7, educates Veterans and their families, as well as the public and healthcare providers about safe opioid use; improves provider and patient interactions related to opioid use, and helps improve delivery of care and health outcomes for Veterans." Uh, you have uh, and then, again, you read a little bit down and it says, "VA's Opioid Safety Initiative has reduced the number of Veterans prescribed on opioid by more than 50 percent over the past six years. With 90 percent of this reduction attributed to a decrease in new patient prescriptions for long-term opioid therapy, VA is managing pain more effectively by using multiple strategies and alternative therapies such as yoga, meditation, and acupuncture. VA healthcare providers also participate in state prescription drug monitoring programs, and training to manage the opioid crisis. Through the partnership, VA and Cigna will also promote existing supporting resources such as the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255, and Cigna's Veteran Support Line, at 1-855-244-6211." Again, that's the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 and Cigna's Veteran Support Line at 1-855-244-6211. For more information on this, visit VA's Pain Management at www.va.gov/PAINMANAGEMENT/Opioid_Safety/index.asp [Link to VA Pain Management webpage] and at www.va.gov/HEALTHPARTNERSHIPS/index.asp [Link to VA Health Partnership webpage]. In addition, I'll take both those links, and I'll put 'em in both my show notes and in my blog at blogs.va.gov [Link to episode blog: <https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/59611/borne-the-battle-143-stephen-holley-navy-seal-veteran-naval-academy-quarterback-carry-the-load-ceo/>].

[00:04:50] SHOW INTRODUCTION:

(TI):

So last week I touched on VA's National Cemetery Administration's partnership with the nonprofit *Carry the Load*. [Background music playing]. From April 25 through May 22 the NCA is partnering with *Carry the Load* to honor Veterans leading up to Memorial Day. *Carry the Load's* mission is to provide active meaningful ways to honor and celebrate the sacrifices made by our nation's heroes: Military Veterans, First Responders, and their families. They are currently conducting three national relays totaling 11,000 miles across this great nation. 26 VA National Cemeteries in 17 states will serve as relay points along the route. In conjunction with the arrival of the *Carry the Load* relay teams, each National Cemetery along the route will unveil a commemorative plaque, a tribute to the fallen honoring Veterans and Gold Star families. This week along the mid-west route, *Carry the Load* will be at Minneapolis, Minnesota on May 2 at 5pm at Fort Snelling National Cemetery. They will be arriving in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on May 6 at 4 pm at the Wood National Cemetery. Again, both those are Central Standard times. Along the east coast, *Carry the Load* will be at Annapolis National Cemetery in Annapolis, Maryland on May 4 at 4 pm. They will start on the south side of the Lincoln Memorial on the 5th at 8 am and they will start their walk through Arlington National Cemetery. Also, on May 5, they will be in Alexandria at the Alexandria National Cemetery at 1:30 pm. And will be in Culpepper, Virginia at the Culpepper National Cemetery on May 6 at 9 am. All those times are Eastern Standard time. Finally, for the west coast, *Carry the Load* rallies will be held at the Sacramento Valley National Cemetery in Dixon, California today May 1 at 11 am. On May 2, they will be at the San Francisco National Cemetery at 8:30 and the Golden Gate National Cemetery at 4:30. On May 7, *Carry the Load* will be at the Los Angeles National Cemetery at 7:30 am. And finally, a week from now, May 8, they will be at the Miramar National Cemetery at 7:30 am.

Now this week's guest is the CEO and co-founder of *Carry the Load*. He's also a former quarterback at the Naval Academy, and a former Navy SEAL. And he's gonna talk to us about what *Carry the Load* is, and how they got involved with the National Cemetery Administration. So, without further ado, I give to you Mr. Stephen Holley.

[00:07:23] Music

[00:07:31] INTERVIEW:

Stephen Holley (SH): You know, having a- a couple of grandfathers, that both served in World War Two, uhm, you know, the thought of service was always in the back of my mind. But it wasn't until high school and, I ended up actually getting recruited to play football at the Naval Academy, and —

(TI): Oh, did you?

(SH): I did, and went up there and took a- a visit, and, you know, spending- spending a weekend there and really learning about that opportunity, and what it entailed, and the opportunities after you graduate is an opportunity that, as an 18 year old kid, I couldn't- couldn't pass up. So, that was really the- the —

(TI): Sure.

(SH): catalyst for- for going there, and it was one of the best decisions I've ever made.

(TI): So, what, uh, so what position did you play?

(SH): I was a quarterback and a running back up there.

(TI): Were you?

(SH): I was.

(TI): What years? 2000 to '04?

(SH): No, I graduated in 2000. '96 to 2000.

(TI): Got you. Uhm, were you recruited anywhere else besides the Naval Academy?

(SH): I was, uhm, growing up here in Texas, it was actually '95, '96 was the end of the old Southwest Conference.

(TI): Aw, man.

(SH): So- so —

(TI): My father in-law is- he's from Texas, he misses the SWEC.

(SH): There you go. So, you know, some of the smaller Southwest Conference schools, uhm, SMU, Rice. Some other schol —

(TI): Yeah.

(SH): some of the smaller schools. But, uh, ended up at the Academy.

(TI): Who was either your best friend or your greatest mentor while you were in?

(SH): At the Academy, or once in service?

(TI): Once in service, either or.

(SH): You know, there- there were several. Uhm, but I'd say, I was lucky to have, you know, coming out the Academy, going straight to BUD/S, coming to actually arriving- getting through the- the SEAL training pipeline —

(TI): Yeah.

(SH): uhm, ended up arriving at SEAL Team 5 November the first of 2001. So —

(TI): Wow, so you went into- you went into the SEALs pretty quick right after joining the Navy.

(SH): Yeah, I went- I went straight from the Academy into the- into the pipeline. Went through BUD/S, jump school, advanced training, and you know, all that takes, uhm, about a year, or it did at the time. It's- it's similar today. But, uhm, about a year to get through there, and got- got through there and- and checked in November the first, 2001. So, pretty interesting timeframe as it relates to the events of September 11. And as- —

(TI): Sure.

(SH): as a young officer, going straight into a platoon, had several, uh, really good mentors. And, uhm, you know, both officer and enlisted. But as a- as a young officer, coming into a platoon, you really rely heavily on the senior enlisted in that platoon to guide you, mentor you, uh, get you —

(TI): Absolutely.

(SH): get you up to speed pretty quickly. So, there was- there was a couple of pretty key senior enlisted that, uhm, were a part of that mentorship. And- and you know, the two guys that I think about most often in that role are two guys that, uhm, one in particular I'm still very close with today. But, uhm, stay in- stay in touch with both of 'em.

(TI): Got you, got you. Uh, what was- what did they teach you? What did you learn from them? What was, uh, um, you know, do you wanna give out their names even? Uh —

(SH): You know what, they're now both, uh, retired. Uh, yeah. I'll give the name, both of 'em. Uh, Dave Buteras, who was a, uh, an E-7, a Chief at the time of Team 5. And, then a guy named, uh, a guy named Will Spencer, who was a- an E-6 at the time, in my first platoon. Uh, both of those guys, I would tell ya, uhm, they expected a lot. But they also, you know, they also were there, both professionally and personally to help, you know, as a young officer, especially in the SEAL community, that- that line between officer and enlisted somewhat blurred. Because —

(TI): Sure.

(SH): the training, because the- the relationship once you get into a platoon. And, navigating that blurry line, and- and knowing when, uhm, it- it — knowing when to act appropriately was- was, uhm, it was something that they helped guide me through. Uhm, but, aside from that, you know, just on the training side, and your skills and your profic- proficiency. You know, leaning on two guys that had been in- had been in the community for decades was something that, uh, was instrumental in my- in my, uh, progression as a SEAL officer.

(TI): Interesting. Uh, inter- very interesting. Uhm, another thing that was in your bio was, uh, was that you had four deployments to Iraq and southeast Asia. Now, Iraq is something that you see in- you know, from- from you know, our generation a lot. But not southeast Asia. Was that- was that counter-insurgency operations at the time?

(SH): It was, it was. Uh, working with some host stations down there. A lot of the in and around, uh, throughout the Philippines.

(TI): Yep.

(SH): Uhm, working, tracking, targeting began with the help of hos- some of the host nations down there with some al-Qaeda affiliates in that part of the world.

(TI): So, when and why did you know it was time to leave the service?

(SH): Uh, you know it's an interesting question. I thought that I was gonna be a career SEAL officer.

(TI): Like the 30 years, full-time?

(SH): [Laughter]. Yeah, 20 to 30 years, and —

(TI): Gotcha.

(SH): Uh, after deploying four times, it was in the midst- it was after that fourth deployment when my wife and I- she got pregnant, uhm, unexpectedly, for the first time, with our first child. And, that really —

(TI): Yeah.

(SH): that really changed my- changed my perspective, changed my priorities. And, uh, that was- that was the catalyst for me, making the decision to- to get out- to get out of the Navy.

(TI): Gotcha. It's always different, when, uh, when you're single and you're young and you're 20. And- and you know, you've got the world by the horns. But it seems always that-that when you- when a family is started, it always seems to really change, like you said, change your perspective.

(SH): It really does, and- and you know, one of the- one of the things that I've gained through the time that's passed since that decision, is just how much respect I have for the guys that were raising families and living that lifestyle. You know, we were gone —

(TI): Absolutely.

(SH): you know, you're- even when you're home training, you're gone constantly, and then, you stack a bunch of deployments on each other, and you're- you're very rarely home. And so, having —

(TI): Yeah.

(SH): the utmost respect for the guys that, uhm, continued to stay married, continued to raise chil- you know, raise and have children while they were simultaneously, uh, serving their nation in that capacity, it's something that, uhm, I just have the- the utmost respect for, 'cause I don't know how, you know, that's a decision I made. I don't know how I could have done it. And for them to- for them to —

(TI): Yeah.

(SH): make those sacrifices is just something that, uhm, you know, I have greater and greater respect for as time goes on and I'm sitting here raising a family of five myself, so.

(TI): Family of five? Man, that- yeah. That would be extremely hard to keep deploying with a family of five.

(SH): Yeah.

(TI): Oh my gosh. So, what was the- so you got out. What year did you get out?

(SH): Uh, got off active duty in 2006, mid-'06, and then —

(TI): So, that was- that was right before the- the great recession?

(SH): Yeah, you bet.

(TI): [Laughter] What was the- what was the hardest part about that transition?

(SH): You know there was several interesting things about that transition. Uhm, for me, it was coming out of a- coming out of a profession. Coming out of a job as a- as a SEAL that, if I could write the perfect job description, I was doing it. So, coming out as a civilian and trying to figure out what I was going to do professionally, not only to provide for the family, but to hopefully [Laughter] get close to the same level of job satisfaction. And —

(TI): Sure.

(SH): [Laughter]. What I've realized since then is —

(TI): [Laughter].

(SH): It- it- I haven't found it, really. It- it, you know, it doesn't exist. And- and I say that in the sense that, uh, I wouldn't- I wouldn't change a thing about that decision, but, you know, getting out as a civilian and just going to work, and making money and raising a family. That's, you know, my highest priority. But the- but the level of job satisfaction that you get from, you know, coming from, you know, living, eating, breathing, deploying with 16 guys that you're very close to and getting to do the things that you were trained to do, all over the world that's —

(TI): That can affect national security, and, you know —

(SH): yeah, that kind of- that kind of feeling's hard to beat, so.

(TI): You know, back in episode 140, uh, Danny Chung, who's the Chief of Staff of Military Affairs of Microsoft, he told me that, uhm, you know, he's

been out for ten years, and when people ask him how- how was your transit- how was your transition? He goes, "I'm still transitioning." Do you feel now that- I mean you've been out for a while, as well. Do you feel like you're still transitioning, as well?

(SH): The short answer there is yes. I don't –

(TI): Yeah.

(SH): I don't think you ever- you ever, uhm – I think it- there's aspects of it that become easier. Where, you know, with the benefit of time and experience, uh, but I, again, speaking for me, coming out of that perfect dream job as a SEAL officer, uhm, I believe that transition will be [Laughter] will be ongoing forever.

(TI): [Laughter] For the rest of your life.

(SH): There will- there will always be a part of me that- that, uhm, uh, is- is former SEAL officer. And, so, uhm –

(TI): Yeah.

(SH): Finding- finding direction, personally, professionally, uhm, and how you- how you incorporate those- those values and those life experiences that are important to you, and those priorities, uh, into your life post-service is something that you'll always- you're always, uhm, you're always dealing with.

(TI): So, in addition to you and- and a fellow Navy SEAL, Clint Bruce, uh, you guys founded *Carry the Load*. You've also done some other nonprofit in the Dallas area, correct?

(SH): Yes, after I got out of the Navy and got into the, uhm, commercial real estate world here, uh, worked in varying capacities on a volunteer basis with a num- number of nonprofits. But ultimately, you know, through a series of ev- of events with Clint, and, you know, that- that transitional period where – you know, one thing that was consistent throughout that transition is I would have lunch or meet with other Veterans, you know, whether they were SEALS –

(TI): Sure.

(SH): whether they were coming out of Army or the Marine Corps. But, similar experiences, having deployed overseas, same time period.

(TI): Yeah.

(SH): We were all- and again, this was true for me, searching for, even though we'd taken the uniform off, we were searching for an opportunity to continue to serve in some way shape or form. And that —

(TI): Yeah.

(SH): that's where *Carry the Load* really filled a void for me, was, being- starting an organization that could have a direct impact through our events, and- and more importantly- through- or just as importantly, through the money that we raised on, you know, military Veterans, their families, First Responders. Uhm, that was something that was critical for me, and- and really, I didn't know it at the time, and- but it was imperative for me to find- find a way to continue to serve in some way shape or form.

(TI): Absolutely. So, I know what *Carry the Load* is, uh, 'cause I- I saw some of your representatives there at Quantico National Cemetery, probably about a month ago when Woody Williams and- and you guys helped dedicate a plaque for uh, not only military Veterans and their families at the National Cemetery. But, for- for our listeners — I know what it is, but so, for our listeners, what is *Carry the Load*?

(SH): *Carry the Load* is a nonprofit, uh, based here in Dallas that was born out of, uh, a desire to restore the meaning of Memorial Day. And I say that, in a sense speaking for a post-9/11, you know, combat Veteran.

(TI): Yeah.

(SH): When- when Clint, as you referenced earlier, the co-founder of *Carry the Load*. You know, he had an experience, this is going back 2009-2010, where he was at a Memorial Day gathering, uh, in his neighborhood, I believe. And- and you know, Memorial Day typically has been a three-day weekend that starts the summer. It's a- it's a barbecue, it's a chance to get out of town. Nothing wrong with any of those things. But he was at this gathering and there was no, uhm, there was no talk, there was no remembrance of, there was no discussion around- around the reason that holiday exists. And- and he —

(TI): Wow.

(SH): and I were both coming on the heels of- coming off the heels of losing some- some friends of ours that we had served with. And so —

(TI): After- after deployment? After you guys came home? —

(SH): Yeah, after- after we came home, some guys that we knew that were still on the teams had, uh, had died. And- and losing friends, coupled with the fact that no one's recognizing or seemed to understand what was going on there, you know, we sat down and started talking about an event that we could, and again, selfishly, at the beginning, this was an event that was aimed towards Veterans. It was- it was an opportunity for us to come together and have —

(TI): Yeah.

(SH): a meaningful Memorial Day experience. And, what it has turned into over the last nine years, and- and again, I use the term — the one, you know, it's less than one percent that have served post-9/11. But it- one percent, uhm, and the 99 percent. And we started- we started this event for the one percent, an opportunity for us to go have a meaningful Memorial Day experience. What we didn't calculate was how important to the other 99 percent, you know, a meaningful Memorial Day experience was. And for families —

(TI): Kind of like, education standpoint, or, from a —

(SH): Well, I- I think from an education standpoint, but also people realizing what that holiday is supposed to be —

(TI): Yeah.

(SH): and, you know, when you look at that — those percentages, 99 percent not having served, a lot of people don't have that direct connection to the military.

(TI): Yeah.

(SH): But they know that, you know, what Memorial Day is supposed to mean, so, giving people an opportunity, whether they have a direct connection or not, an opportunity- or a platform to have a meaningful experience and a way to observe that holiday. And we're one of many meaningful ways to observe that holiday. But, it- it has turned into, and our growth over the last nine years has been fueled by, you know, that 99 percent. And, uh —

(TI): Really?

(SH): Oh, you bet. You know, when you look at, you know — 2- in 2011, we had our first event here in Dallas and it —

(TI): Yeah.

(SH): it was a 20 hour walk, and we had probably five or six hundred registered participants, and we raised about a 100,000 dollars. Here we are —

(TI): That's a pretty good turnout.

(SH): Yeah —

(TI): For- for a first event, absolutely.

(SH): First event. Here we are nine years later, and in eight years, we've raised over 22 million dollars for other non-profits that serve military, Veteran, their families, law enforcement, fire and rescue personnel, and those non-profits are scattered across the country. So, when you look at that sum of money that we've been able to raise and the amount of money that we've been able to give away to these other- these other nonprofits, that —

(TI): Yeah.

(SH): that growth is largely fueled — it- we have a- a laundry list of —

(TI): That's —

(SH): of phenomenal —

(TI): that —

(SH): corporate sponsors that underwrite our events.

(TI): Yeah.

(SH): But the vast majority of the money that we- we've raised has been through, you know, has been through our- our participants and- and, for lack of a better term, you know, uh, some of the, uh, fundraising software that allows us to- to uh, grab donations in 5, 10, 15, 20 dollar increments from across the country, and that's —

(TI): It's like the- the single donations are the- are the- is the bulk of your money is what you're saying.

(SH): You bet. Our corporate sponsors —

(TI): Donations.

(SH): under- underwrite our events, and our- our participants fundraise and- and actually raise the bulk of the money that- that we give away to these other nonprofits.

(TI): Yeah, your- your website calls that your continuum of care?

(SH): Yes, yes.

(TI): What are some of the other nonprofits that you donate to?

(SH): We start a process every year, uh, in the fall, with a volunteer committee here in Dallas to- they'll take, uhm- golly, it's grown over the years, but I think this past year we had 80 to a 100 different, uhm, applications from across the country from our- from potential non-profit partners. And this committee will- spends about three months, uhm, going through that selection process and vetting. And so, all I should say is —

(TI): Oh wow.

(SH): these nonprofit partners, uhm, are on the spectrum of that continuum of care, whether they are, uh, providing medical assistance, job assistance, uh, you know, we've got a- a number of very unconventional uh, therapies. But, our featured partners here in 2019, if you go to carrytheload.org [Link to Carry the Load Website: <http://www.carrytheload.org/site/PageServer?pagename=home>] you can click on Continu- Continuum of Care. But, uh, *22Kill*, uh, is a group here in Dallas, that- that their mission is to create a community that- that really raises awareness, and, uhm, resource to combat, you know, the- the suicide rate that we see from both military and- and Veterans. Uhm —

(TI): Sure.

(SH): [inaudible] while they're in transitioning. Uh, *Sons of the Flag*, the *Travis Manion Foundation*, uhm, *Assist the Officer*, the *Gratitude Initiative*. *Gratitude Initiative* is another one that- that provides education assistance to Gold Star families, and education assistance being, uh, a curriculum that takes these kids, uh, very early on in their high school careers and gets them ready for, you know, there's a lot of- there's a lot of resources out there for, uh, college scholarships for Gold Star kids.

(TI): Mmm.

(SH): The need that was met through *Gratitude Initiative* was, you know, if these- and that's great. But if these kids aren't ready with, uhm, with the training and resources that they need to take advantage of those college

scholarships, then- then, uhm, they aren't maximized as effectively as they could be. So, a lot- a lot —

(TI): Sure.

(SH): of tools there throughout as they are getting ready for college throughout high school, uhm, the *Sheepdog Impact Assistance*, uhm, *A Soldier's Child Foundation*, I mean, there's —

(TI): There's a plethora of them it sounds like.

(SH): There's a- there's a ton of them. And again, they're- they're- they're all across the country and they fall somewhere on that continuum. And, that continuum, you know, I use that term because there's- there's needs that —

(TI): Continuum meaning- meaning a more direct support.

(SH): Yeah —

(TI): is — yeah, got you.

(SH): continuum meaning there's a spectrum of needs, and —

(TI): Yep.

(SH): and- depending on where a servicemember is, whether they're still in, or they're out transitioning, they're somewhere- there's needs along that spectrum that can't be met by one organization. So, being able to plug in —

(TI): Yeah.

(SH): with multiple organizations that are doing, uh, phenomenal work, uhm, somewhere across that spectrum. And, the other thing, which we've seen with our nonprofits- nonprofit partners that has evolved over the years is their partnership together and being able to leverage, and resources —

(TI): That's good.

(SH): off one another. Uhm, has been something that we didn't anticipate, but has been extremely exciting to see.

(TI): That's really cool. Uhm, it's- it's nice to hear that there's a vetting process for how you, uh, you know, donate to certain organizations —

- (SH): Yeah, yeah. When you're giving away, you know, you giving away the amount of money that we do every year, it- you —
- (TI): [Laughter].
- (SH): we realized early on that we had to have a- a process that we could point to and that would- could be able to be audited every year. Uh, because, again, the amount of money that we've been able to give away over the years is — been pretty incredible.
- (TI): Yeah. Yeah, you- you- it's something that you and Clint should definitely be proud of. Uhm, you- it- you were also telling us that you give away 93 percent of your donations. Like the other seven percent goes to operations and fundraising, but you give away 93 percent of what you guys have raised?
- (SH): Yes. And, you know, that —
- (TI): That's pretty amazing.
- (SH): by non-profit standards, you always wanna, you know, be somewhere around that ten percent or less mark, and, you know, over —
- (TI): Yeah.
- (SH): the past eight years, we've been able to maintain a very, uh, a very lean percentage as far as our administrative and operating costs. And that- that goes to the fact that we have a- a very small, but capable staff here in Dallas. And, the vast majority of, you know, the- the work that gets done across the country as we- as we head into May with all of our events that will happen, here in 2019 is —
- (TI): Yeah, it's coming- it's coming right around the corner. Your- the big day, the big day so.
- (SH): Yeah, you bet it's- the vast majority of all that work, when you look at all the people that are working on our behalf, are, you know, myself included, are- are volunteers.
- (TI): You know as a Veteran, uh, you know, when you're in the Marine Corps, or now, even in the government, uh, I'm always take part of the *CFC Campaign*, so like, that 93 — seeing that 93 percent, you know, you always look and are flipping through that book, and go, okay, who's actually spending the money on the people that they're supposed to be caring for? And who's actually you know, at 50 percent operating costs, you

know? So, it's good to see, uh, uh, a nonprofit that says, hey, 93 percent of our- our money that is donated to us, we give back to a nonprofit that's actually gonna use it. Uhm, so, what are- what are some of the programs that you, uh, that you guys either do – what are some of the programs that you guys either do with the money, or that you donate to?

(SH): Our programs are- the vast majority of our- our program expense is, uh, aimed at our events during the month of May.

(TI): Yeah.

(SH): We have- and here we are in 2019, we'll have three national relays that are kicking off, uhm, that will kick off in the- in the first week of May 1, uh —

(TI): And that your partnership with the NCA correct?

(SH): Yes. That's- that is part of the partnership with the NCA. Uhm, participation and the highlighting of different stories. Uhm, that we'll tell throughout those three national relays. But, one which will be coming down the east coast that we've had for the last seven years, one for the last five years, and the west coast starting in Seattle, and then for the first time, we'll have one kicking off in Minneapolis that will be our mid-wes- mid-west leg. But all of those culminating, and- and all of those being billboards for, not only *Carry the Load*, but, the Memorial Day holiday. And all of those three —

(TI): Yeah.

(SH): National relay legs will culminate in Dallas with our flagship event here in Dallas, uh, Memorial Day weekend.

(TI): So, it's a relay. What- if someone wants to- if someone sees this relay, what what- are they seeing? What- what does it look like? Uhm, can a person participate? How can they do that?

(SH): They- they can go to [carrytheload.org](http://www.carrytheload.org) [Link to Carry the Load website: <http://www.carrytheload.org/site/PageServer?pagename=home>] and when you go to our Events, there's an Events page there, and you can go to National Relay, and then you can filter by east coast, west coast, mid-west. And, you keep drilling down, and you will see mile by mile, uh, our leg. Again, going from New York to Dallas, Seattle to Dallas, and Minneapolis to Dallas. And, we have a —

(TI): Uh-huh.

(SH): rally point every five miles along those legs, and, it —

(TI): Mmmhmm.

(SH): it's interesting how these relays have evolved over the years, and our- our first National Relay in 2012 on the east coast, you know, we were in a small little rented RV, and, you know, we- we had some decent participation with us. People showing up at these rally points to walk, and to, uhm, to participate with us, to tell us the stories of those that they were impacted by, that um, some of 'em had made the ultimate sacrifice, and so, over the years, that- that, through our corporate sponsors we have grown, really our- our participation could look like a couple hundred people at a particular rally, uhm, you know, in a major metropolitan area, uh —

(TI): At one of these rally points?

(SH): You bet, and I've had others —

(TI): Gotcha.

(SH): where, you know, I've been at rally points in the middle of the night, and- and you know, in small town Tennessee, and had people show up at 12 am and jump out of the car to go walk five miles with me to talk about their son, their nephew, their brother, their friend that they lost, and you know, they heard about *Carry the Load* and they- they wanted to participate as a way to honor, again, those- those friends, those loved ones who've- who have made the ultimate sacrifice. So, today we've got, you know, I mentioned early on, we had [Laughter] these small rented RVs. Today we've got large touring buses with small, dedicated staff —

(TI): [Laughter].

(SH): that handles the logistics and the media and the PR and all the things that- that need to happen to make these events possible. But, it- it —

(TI): Yeah.

(SH): again, the vast majority of our — and, in 2018, across the country, both with our relays, our rally, and our event, uh, in Dallas, we we- had an excess of 50,000 people participate with us across the country, so. Uhm, it's- it's —

(TI): That's pretty good.

(SH): a lot of different- a lot of different ways that looks, depending on- on where you are.

(TI): Gotcha. And these relays, they're kinda like uh, kinda like an Olympic torch relay, correct? Like it's somebody carrying a flag —

(SH): You bet they —

(TI): walking through thousands of miles, right?

(SH): You bet. These- When these relays kick off in- in the respective cities we discussed, that flag will never stop, 24/7, until it gets to Dallas Memorial Day weekend. And again, our- our rally points, generally, are- are, you know, we cover two hours — uh, excuse me. Cover five miles about every two hours. So those rally points are- are staggered and strategically located so that we can hopefully maximize participation through- through some of the more densely pop- populated areas across the country.

(TI): Gotcha. So, these- these relay points, they're just kind of a- a little bit of a rest area, and maybe a hand off point for the flag?

(SH): You're exactly right. They're- they're a brief rest —

(TI): Gotcha.

(SH): or- and a hand off in- and the ability for- for people to have a- a definitive stop and start for- for planning purposes.

(TI): Got you. How do you select your relay participants?

(SH): Our- it's interesting how that has evolved over the years. Uhm —

(TI): Yeah.

(SH): early on, we had a partnership with a small college in- in southern Georgia. And, it was through a relationship we had with, uhm, the dean of the business school at this small school. And he, would help us plan, but he would also give his students the opportunity to get course credit for, uhm, the planning and execution of this relay. And so, through those relationships over the years, it- for- for a number of years, it was all college kids that ran these relays. And- and since then, we still rely on some student interns, but those kids who've been doing it, or those- some key kids that- that did it over the years are still, uh, coming back every year to help us plan and execute, uh —

(TI): Oh, wow.

(SH): these relays. And so, we've —

(TI): They're- they're basically coming back and they're saying I want these- these ten miles here in this part of the rac- rac- uh, this part of the relay, or?

(SH): No, I'm- I was referencing the- the- our team that will live and take part in, and execute the relay —

(TI): Roger.

(SH): from start to finish. Our participants are- will come from all of these communities and cities that we walk through.

(TI): Okay.

(SH): And- and, again, that will- that participation has grown every year and every city that we've been to. A good example is, you know, JP Morgan Chase is our lead national sponsor. When we go through New York City, we have a rally point at their- at their headquarters there on, uh, I believe it's, uh, there on Park Avenue. And —

(TI): Roger.

(SH): we'll have a couple hundred people from JP Morgan Chase that will walk from their- from their building on Park, uh, down with us through the city, and- and the next rally point, historically has been the 9/11 Memorial there. And so, you know, we'll have —

(TI): Nice.

(SH): I think we've had two to three hundred people out on that leg before. Uh, always one of the more popular legs, and more, again, extremely impactful leg, given where we end there at the 9/11 Memorial. And- and, uhm, then, like I said, we'll have other legs that are, you know, in- in small-town America. We've had- there's a- there's a town in Tennessee, La Vergne, Tennessee that literally shuts down the town every year when we come through, and, their military, their law enforcement, their fire and rescue, and literally the vast majority of the town comes out to walk with us as we go through that town. So, you really get a —

(TI): That's awesome.

(SH): you really get a different slice or flavor of participation in- in what that relay looks like depending on where you are —

(TI): Sure, absolutely.

(SH): across the country.

(TI): That sounds like a really, really great, uh, you know, I'd be interested to see the- the leg when it comes through. Walk me through how you guys started with the- the National Cemetery Administration, how you partnered with them, and what is that part of the relay?

(SH): That partnership was born, uhm, through- it is- it is evolved over the years, but really as we looked at, uh, some of our potential rally points and the opportunity to walk through some, uhm, to stop at, and- and- and/or walk through some National Cemeteries and honor, you know —

(TI): Yeah.

(SH): friends or relationships that we had through *Carry the Load*, uhm, those, in going through some of that approval process, it got elevated to the chain of command on the NCA side, and- and with our executive director, uhm, being able to tell them what we were doing and why we were doing it, and it was- it evolved kind of organically and naturally, and- and when they figured out what *Carry the Load* was about, and being able to tell stories, uh, about people who'd made the ultimate sacrifice, it- it —

(TI): Oh, that's awesome.

(SH): it made sense for a partnership, and so this year, throughout the month of May, uhm, they will be highlighting, you know, 30 different stories and telling those stories of a little bit about these individuals, and- and again, these are individuals that have served and they've made the ultimate sacrifice, and- and both through *Carry the Load*, NCA and through the- social media, we'll be- we'll be telling those stories, you know, one every day throughout the month. And, again, going back to the percentages I said earlier. The 99 percent and the 1 percent, a lot of people out there in the United States don't have that direct connection to those that have served. But, they- they understand the importance of, uhm, that service and sacrifice, and- and have —

(TI): Yeah.

(SH): really helped us in telling those stories.

(TI): You were talking about the- the other 99 percent, uhm, part of the arm of Carry- there's another part of- arm of *Carry the Load* that's your education arm. Uh, talk to me about what that is. Uh, it looks like you go

to some schools, you do some education about the flag. Uhm, how- how what is your involvement with- and the- the education arm of *Carry the Load*?

(SH): That- that program is called Carry the Flag. And again, that has grown organically as we've grown the last nine years. And, it- it really drew out of being asked to come speak to schools, uhm, different groups, uhm, a lot of kids about what *Carry the Load* is and about Memorial Day, and- and what service and sacrifice looks like. And, it was happening on such a regular basis that we put a curriculum around, uhm, what it means. What it means to serve, what Memorial Day's all about, and then, ultimately there's a- there's curriculum around patriotism, and, our flag, and- and how lucky and blessed we are to live here in the United States. Uhm —

(TI): Absolutely.

(SH): and so, that's- that's another program that, again, grew out of, uhm, grew very organically out of speaking engagements that we were asked to come and talk about *Carry the Load*.

(TI): And is that nation-wide or do you just stick to the Dallas region on that? Uhm, can- can a middle school in- in Washington state, uh, request you guys come out there and speak?

(SH): Yes, and generally, it grew, uhm, out of opportunities here in Dallas, but has really grown across the country. And —

(TI): Okay.

(SH): we have cham- what I call champions that will spearhead these efforts, uh, in different communities across the country, and we will send them, uhm, the curriculum and the tools and resources they need to be able to implement this program, and, uh, it's something that we- uh, have- have spent a lot of time and volunteers putting that curriculum together, and- and so, if anyone is interested in that, they can go to carrytheload.org [Link to Carry the Load webpage] and click on that carry- the Carry the Flag program to learn more about how they could, uh, get involved there as well [Link to Carry the Flag webpage: <http://www.carrytheload.org/site/PageServer?pagename=education>].

(TI): That's important, uh, that's just so important to see, uhm, you know, especially, wha- you know- you gotta start 'em young, right? You gotta start at an early age to really have them understand what- what our flag actually means. And- and —

(SH): Yeah, and, for me, personally, again, this was what I always tell people was an unintended consequence. But, that first year at *Carry the Load*, my oldest two kids were, uh, six and four.

(TI): Yeah.

(SH): And, all they remember is going out to an event, and seeing dad had been running and walking for twenty hours, uh, and extremely exhausted. But dad was, you know, dad had a weight vest on with pictures of friends who had made the ultimate sacrifice. And so, again, at six and four, they didn't- they didn't get it. But, as they've grown, and now, uh, you know, those two are 13 and 11 with three younger ones behind 'em. But, one of the highlights of our year as a family is- is *Carry the Load* every year. And, as they've gotten older —

(TI): Yeah.

(SH): you know, it's probably when those two were eight and six, nine and seven, when I started to get some very, uh, very interesting questions about, you know, "Dad, when's *Carry the Load*?" and "Why are all these people gathering?" And, "who — "you know we have these storyboards throughout these events, not only on a relay, but here at our event in Dallas, with, you know, like I said, telling stories of people who have made the ultimate sacrifice. So, getting some- some pretty interesting questions at a young age, where they can wrap their head around what we're doing and why we're out there. And, for- for my family, again, *Carry the Load* is- I get- this time of year I'll start getting questions every day about when's *Carry the Load*, because our event in Dallas, our flagship event, is a- is a very family friendly event. It's very, uh, very celebratory, very festive. A lot of kid's activities. But at the same time, there's the opportunity that- for- for uhm, for it to be somber, as well. But, going back to your question about educating the next generation, that- for my family, grew very organically, but we realized how important it is to educate that next generation, uhm, about the importance of- of service and sacrifice and- and what that means to our country.

(TI): Stephen, is there one thing that- that you learned from your time in the Navy that you utilize today?

(SH): Oh, I think there's- there's a lot of different things. Uh —

(TI): Sure.

(SH): That's- that's an easy question, it's very tough just to try to narrow it down to one thing.

(TI): Sure.

(SH): You know I- I think the one thing that I try- that I try to think about every day, you know, no matter, um, well maybe two things. No- no matter how tough my day might seem with, you know, job, uhm, volunteer commitments, uh, you know, raising a family, and- and all the logistics and time and things that go into our daily life, you know, I think about friends of mine that don't have that opportunity, that made the ultimate sacrifice and- and how lucky I am to, uhm —

(TI): Ame- Amen.

(SH): How lucky I am to have that, and the other thing, going back to, you know the SEAL community, and what really started in BUD/S, is, uhm, you know, both good and bad days. No matter what, just to keep a- to keep the proper perspective, and uh, just taking things one day at a time.

(TI): That's awesome. Stephen is there anything that I didn't ask, or- or anything that I'm not thinking of that you'd like to share?

(SH): I- if I could try to put a bow around our conversation. *Carry the Load* was born out of anger, frustration, sadness. And, it has blossomed and grown into a national movement where, uhm, people that don't have that direct connection can- can come out, have a meaningful Memorial Day experience, and those, uhm, and through those events we- we raise a lot of money for military and Veteran personnel and law enforcement, fire and rescue personnel, and, it's a- it's a very unique experience. If people haven't ever participated, I would just encourage you to go to carrytheload.org [Link to *Carry the Load* webpage] and to learn about what we do, and if you're so inclined, we'd love to have you participate, uh, donate, uh, or volunteer with us somewhere across the country.

[00:47:53] Music

[00:48:02] PSA:

Man 1: I served in Vietnam.

Man 2: I served in World War Two.

Woman: I served in Afghanistan.

Man 1: And VA serves us all.

Man 2: No matter when you served.

Woman: No matter if you saw combat or not.

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

Woman: See what VA can do for you.

Narrator: To learn what benefits you may be eligible for, visit www.va.gov. That's www.va.gov [Link to VA website].

[00:48:31] Music

[00:48:37] CLOSING MONOLOGUE:

(TI): Want to thank Stephen Holley for taking the time to be on the show this week. And, allowing us to learn more about *Carry the Load*. This week's *Borne the Battle* Veteran of the Week is Navy Veteran Marc Alan Lee. Marc enlisted in the United States Navy SEAL program in 2001. During the course of the program, Marc developed pneumonia and was forced to drop out. In 2004, after deploying as an Aviation Ordnance Technician aboard an aircraft carrier, Marc returned to SEAL training. He went on to complete the program in November of 2004, and was assigned to Charlie Platoon, Task Unit Bruiser of SEAL Team 3. Marc and his platoon were deployed to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. In 2006, Marc and his fellow Navy SEALs joined U.S. and Iraqi soldiers in support of an offensive against an insurgent stronghold in Ramadi, Iraq. During one engagement, Marc and his team came under intense fire from heavily armed and aggressive insurgent forces. In an effort to protect his fellow teammates, Marc exposed himself to direct fire and engaged the enemy with his machine gun. During his efforts to protect his fellow servicemembers, Marc was fatally wounded. Marc was laid to rest at Fort Rosencrantz National Cemetery in San Diego, California, and he was the first Navy SEAL to be killed while deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. In addition to a Bronze Star with Valor, and a Purple Heart, Marc was posthumously awarded the Silver Star for his actions. We honor his service.

That's it for this week's *Borne the Battle*. If you would like to nominate a *Borne the Battle* Veteran of the week, you can always reach us on Twitter [Link to VA's twitter page: https://twitter.com/DeptVetAffairs?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwa] or Facebook [Link to VA's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/VeteransAffairs>], Instagram [Link to VA's Instagram page: <https://www.instagram.com/deptvetaffairs/?hl=en>], YouTube [Link to VA's YouTube page: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCBvOzPLmbzjtpX-Htstp2vw>].

DeptVetAffairs, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. No matter the social media, you can always find us with that blue checkmark. Thanks again for listening, and we'll see you next week.

[00:50:33] Music

(Text Transcript Ends)