

Borne the Battle

Episode # 141

BourBiz—Military Veteran / Military Spouse Networking Event

<https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/59148/borne-battle-141-bourbiz-military-veteran-military-spouse-networking-event/>

(Text Transcript Follows)

[00:00:00] Music

[00:00:10] OPENING MONOLOGUE:

Tanner Iskra (TI): What is this? Monday, April 22, 2019. *Borne the Battle* brought to you by the Department of Veterans Affairs. I am your host, Marine Corps Veteran Tanner Iskra. Hope everybody had a good Easter weekend. I went to the – I went to the Arlington National Cemetery and saw the Sunrise Service. If you have never been to Arlington National Cemetery during the Sunrise Service, I highly suggest it. Yes, this is a Monday. This is a bonus episode of *Borne the Battle*. This is not the Mel Brooks-Adrian Cronauer episode that has been promised. We are only at 63-percent of our ratings and reviews goal, so as soon as that happens, we will get that one out to you. This episode is an experiment of sorts. I went to a military veteran and military spouse networking event. It was called *BourBiz*. I was told about this event by Brett D’Allesandro and Alexa Modero, uh, founders of the nonprofit, *Backpacks for Life*, when I was interviewing them. They were part of a veteran-owned business pitch competition that was gonna be held at this event in DC called *BourBiz*. And I said, “Well, what’s *BourBiz*?” And they said, “Well, it’s tomorrow and it is in DC.” And I said, “Well, I am in DC. One: We could have done the interview live. Two: I’m gonna go to this event.” Um, at the competition, they got second place, and they were awarded \$15,000. Uh, Brett and Alexa will be future guests on the show, and they do touch on the event. However, like I said, the interview was done before *BourBiz*, and spoiler, they got second place. *BourBiz* was put on by the nonprofit, *The Veteran Resource Support Group*, which is a nonprofit headed up by Marine Veteran Justin Constantine and Army Veteran Scott Davidson. They will also be future guests on the show. It was a free event, uh, for veterans and military spouses that held the aforementioned pitch competition. Uh, it also had panel discussions with military veteran influencers like Vet TV’s Donny O’Malley. It had a live podcast by veteran-owned Pop Smoke Media, and it

had an open bar. Overall, it looked like it was an event that looked to bring the veteran community closer together. So, uh, I was happy to attend. Uh, again, this was last Thursday on the 18th. I didn't know about it until the day prior, and within 24 hours, I was hooked up with a booth. So, with little time to plan, I brought my gear and I figured I was gonna catch something. Um, I set up, I did two interviews, and it was so loud I didn't think I was capturing anything. Uh, I mean, they were having a live auction right next to me, so-so I just shut the whole operation down and I took the whole thing in. However, when I went home, I learned that my, uh, mics actually captured the interviews and the audio wasn't too bad over the crowd noise. So, without further ado, I bring to you Captain Rafael Ortiz from *Reserve Organization of America* and Lieutenant Colonel Olivia Nunn, still active duty, from *Soldiers for Life*. Enjoy.

[00:03:04] Music

[00:03:14] CAPTAIN RAFAEL ORTIZ INTERVIEW:

(TI): It's pretty good, uh – pretty good turn-out. Looks like, uh, almost a thousand Veterans here, and uh, vendors, and – and they're all here to help Veterans. It's – Everyone's very friendly. Um, looking forward to see what I can capture here.

Rafael Ortiz (RO): No one else can hear me but you, correct?

(TI): That's right. That's right.

(RO): [Laughter]

(TI): It'll be – yeah. This isn't gonna to be live or anything. Uh, um, if anything, I'll be – I'll be cutting this down afterwards. I don't even know what I'm gonna get. I have no idea what I'm gonna get here. So –

(RO): That's okay.

(TI): This could be – this could be garbage, or this could be, uh, really something valuable that I could take back and – and share it with our community. So, I am here with Captain Rafael Ortiz, US Coast Guard Retired, correct?

(RO): Yes, sir.

(TI): And you are with *ROA*. What is *ROA*?

(RO): Well *ROA* was originally commissioned or – or created by Black Jack Pershing as a *Reserve Officer Association* after World War I.

(TI): Pershing as in the General Pershing?

(RO): General Black Jack Pershing. –

(TI): Oh wow. –

(RO): Came back after World War I and was really not happy with Congress.

(TI): Yeah.

(RO): So, he created, out of his wardroom, and the wardroom being the officers –

(TI): Yeah.

(RO): of the Army, came back and – and in the Willard Hotel in 1922, created this organization to support and create oh – uh, a strong national defense.

(TI): Okay.

(RO): If you're familiar with history, way back then, there was a move to make the U.S. completely peaceful and eliminate our military resources entirely.

(TI): Uh huh.

(RO): The feeling was, if we don't have a military, no one will be threatened, and so no one else will create a military.

(TI): Yeah, I don't know if that'll work. [Laughter]

(RO): Yeah. So, he created this organization with of his – his officers and started out Army officers –

(TI): Okay.

(RO): And over time grew, incorporated all the other services. And just last year, we, uh, similar to other organizations, expanded from officers to all enlisted. So, it's all ranks, and it's now *Reserve Organization of America*, and its E-1 all the way up through, you know, O-10. And it's – it's active reserve and retired.

(TI): So, it's *Reserve Organization and- of America*. Um, is that wh– what your focus is, reservists?

(RO): Yeah, it is now. It's – you think back to 1922. 1922, there weren't a whole lot of Veterans organizations around.

(TI): Of course. Yeah, no. Yeah.

(RO): VFW, American Legion, just – just a few.

(TI): Just a couple, yeah.

(RO): Now you can't swing a cat without hitting a VSO in DC.

(TI): Yeah, I think, uh, our previous episode, uh, Danny Chung of Microsoft said there's over 49,000 Veteran Service Organizations.

(RO): And the – the legacy ones, the ones that are really old, are having problems maintaining memberships because everyone's getting into their splinter groups.

(TI): Yeah.

(RO): Yeah. I – If you stubbed your toe on the USS Enterprise, there's probably a VSO just for you, for all the people who stubbed their toes, you know what I'm saying?

(TI): Sure, sure, sure, sure.

(RO): So, everyone's got their own focus group, but some of the older ones are still working to – to do some of the main core things. Why Black Jack Pershing picked the reservist is because reservist, unlike the Hatch Act or Title X or UCMJ, the reservist, when he's not drilling, can be an activist on Congress. So, he can go lobby Congress.

(TI): Okay.

(RO): So that's why he picked the reserves. Even though we're comprised of active reserve and retired, the reserves kind of can carry the water and go up and kind of poke our Congress – Congressional Members in the chest and say, "Hey, we still have some validity. We're still in, but here's the things we need now." So, that's – that's kind of what we're about.

(TI): So, that's really cool. So, uh, Captain Ortiz, if you had one thing to – to – that, uh, our listeners could take away from – from, uh, this interaction right here, where can they find you, wh– wh– what can they do?

(RO): roa.org [Link to ROA's website]. Get online, get involved, as well as any other service organization. We need our members. We need all of our Military to be actives so that Congress will see how many people are still supporting and – and – and out there. It's a great networking opportunity. Uh, you've got a lot of CEOs and other people that are reservists that have

connections already to the civilian population. And so, that's where our way really – it's – with mentoring and networking, it's a great opportunity.

[00:07:50] LIEUTENANT COLONEL OLIVIA NUNN INTERVIEW:

(TI): I know I just told you to go to this mic, but, uh, for whatever reasons channels 1 and 2 –

Olivia Nunn (ON): [Laughter]

(TI): are now mixed, so –

(ON): It's all good. –

(TI): Uh, we are adapting and overcoming, right? So, I am with, uh, Lieutenant Colonel Nunn, right? First name?

(ON): Olivia.

(TI): Olivia? And you are still active duty.

(ON): I am.

(TI): And you are with?

(ON): *US Army Soldier for Life.*

(TI): Okay. And why are you here at *BourBiz*?

(ON): So, *US Army Soldier for Life* is a strategic organization where we are outreach. And what we do is we work with organizations that want to work with the Army to find opportunities for our Army soldiers, our Army Veterans, and our Army family members.

(TI): So, it's like *Marine for Life* but with –

(ON): Very similar. –

(TI): Okay. –

(ON): Very, very similar. Um, so they are our battle buddies. Uh, we do a lot of the same work. And those opportunities can exist in the way of employment, education, health and wellness, uh, creating policy, or maybe even changing policy. Ultimately, it is how do we curate the opportunity that best fits our Veterans as they exit their service.

(TI): So, is this the first time with – at – at like a *BourBiz*? Is this the first time with *BourBiz*?

(ON): So, we've – I've had a colleague that have attended *BourBiz* before and they, uh, said that it was a great venue. And it was, uh, last year in DC. And, uh, but for – for myself as the Director of Communication as a Public Affairs Officer, it's the first time I've been at a *BourBiz*.

(TI): Got it. –

(ON): So, it's kind of interesting to see all the different resources that are here tonight and being able to meet the Veterans that are here in this space, um, wanting to share who we are. And then more importantly, how do we create a relationship that best fits our Veterans.

(TI): I mean, I knew *Marine for Life* when I – when I got out. Um, are you – Do you find challenges that some people don't know what *Soldier for Life* is?

(ON): So, I think the challenges that I continuously hear everywhere I go and the different spots that I go is that there is a lot of information out there.

(TI): Sure.

(ON): And –

(TI): Over 40,000 organizations.

(ON): Exactly.

(TI): Yeah.

(ON): And I think service members just don't know what they don't know, and what they don't understand is that there are organizations such as our self that are out there with the best interests for them so that we can find them opportunities. And something as simple as just following us on our social media platforms can help widen their breadth of knowledge on the opportunities that are out there. Because every single service member when they exit, they have a different case, a different unique aspect of what they're looking for. So, the big thing is understanding what resources are out there, what are some of the better resources, and then how to capitalize on them.

(TI): And that's basically what *Soldier for Life* does. You guys get, or are like an avenue, for other resources.

(ON): Exactly.

(TI): Okay.

(ON): So, we are all about the connection, the pieces, the networking, which is pretty much what we are here for, right?

(TI): Absolutely. –

(ON): *BourBiz* is a networking event.

(TI): Absolutely. So, uh, it – a – as – as active duty here in uniform, are you allowed, like, one drink at *BourBiz*?

(ON): No.

(TI): [Laughter]

(ON): But, you know, honestly, I'm not really a big drinker anyways.

(TI): Sure.

(ON): So, what I am really excited by is the fact that, um – making new connections here and then meeting some of, um, the older connections that I've had. So, it's – it's a lot of fun. It's a lot of energy here. It's a lot of excitement. Um, but what I really love is that we're all here with one purpose, is how do we make it better for the Veterans.

(TI): Absolutely. Amen. So, um, where can people find what you guys do, how you guys do it? Like, either, if I'm on base, how can I find you, and – or how can I find you online?

(ON): So, we are, uh, share – We share a same name. So, every installation has an organization called *Soldier for Life TAP, Transition Assistance Program*.

(TI): Oh –

(ON): While –

(TI): it's like *TAPs*.

(ON): Exactly.

(TI): Yeah, yeah, we have *TAPs*, yeah.

(ON): It's about the transition assistance. While we share the same name, we have two different headquarters that we work for. But we work together, because ultimately, we want the transition to be successful.

(TI): Of course.

(ON): Um, but if you've already gone beyond your transition year, you find yourself already out of uniform, but you do need some other resources that kind of make sense in your life now, the best way to be connected with *Soldier for Life* are our – our social media platforms. We're pretty big on LinkedIn [Link to *US Army Soldier for Life's* LinkedIn page: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/us-army-soldier-for-life>], on Facebook [Link to *US Army Soldier for Life's* Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/CsaSoldierForLife/>] –

(TI): LinkedIn's your number one?

(ON): Yeah.

(TI): That's interesting. –

(ON): LinkedIn, yeah. So, um, we do share a lot of information on LinkedIn from different networking events to hiring opportunities to simply where's *Soldier for Life* gonna be at next to be able to come meet us. Um, we work with a lot of education – educators and, um, and schools. Like, how do they make it easier for our Veterans to use their 9/11 bill, to go to school. What a lot of Veterans don't realize is that, um, that just because you left high school maybe five or six years ago, and maybe you weren't the best student, that you can still attend a top tiered institution. Those institutions are looking for you.

(TI): Really?

(ON): Yeah. Um, and it's just getting connected with the Veteran organizations within those schools.

(TI): Got you, got you. So, I – I don't know, I – I went to Arizona State, myself, right afterwards. Uh, they were really, really great in getting my SMART transcript, making sure everything was, uh, in order. Uh, the Marine Corps sent me to Syracuse while I was still in, so they – they took those credits in as well. They, uh, are you seeing into more schools that are – that are starting to become more friendly as far as the online aspect of education?

(ON): They are. I think what we're seeing a big push in the last couple of years is that higher institutions are becoming more Veteran-friendly. They understand the value of a student Veteran. They understand that student Veteran's gonna come to class more disciplined. They're gonna be willing to wanna learn. They're gonna have a higher grade point average. Uh, they're gonna be giving back to the school itself because they understand the value of service. So, those schools are looking at the – at those little nuggets of

information and realizing that they're missing out on a demographic of students. And so, they're understanding that –

(TI): And on the GI Bill. [Laughter] –

(ON): Right. And they've got to open up those doors, but they've got to remove the barriers, um, such as the piece that I talked about earlier. You didn't – you don't have to be that 4.0 high school graduate anymore to be able to go to Columbia or Cornell, as an example. Those are just two schools that – of many that we work with that are willing to work with a Veteran because they understand that they've done so many things in their lives in such a short period of time and they're going to bring that value into the classroom, and they want to take advantage of that.

(TI): Absolutely, absolutely. So, uh, Lieutenant Colonel Nunn, if you had one piece of advice for a tran– ... [Background noise]. Sorry, we got a – we got – ... [Background noise]. Alright. Um, either – either A: that's gonna be a good ender [Both laughing], or B: if you had one piece of advice, um, for a Veteran that's transitioning out of the service, or it could be a Vietnam Veteran that is still – that is looking to transition into a – a new field, what would it be?

(ON): So, I think those are two different demographics we're talking.

(TI): Absolutely.

(ON): So, if you are a service member looking to transition, whether because you've only done service for five years or you're about to retire, either way, you need to think about that transition at least 24 months prior to the day that you –

(TI): Two years.

(ON): think – Right. Um, it's not a fast process. You need to come prepared for the layers that you need to go through, but, more importantly, really to understand that there is a vast network of resources available to you and you've just got to understand what best makes sense for you. So, start early and go often. And I think if you're already a transitioned service member, just realize that I think the nation understands that the value of the Veteran matters now, and we're seeing a shift in that, and to reach back into organizations like *Soldier for Life* if you need help.

[00:15:53] Music

[00:15:58] PSA:

- Man 1:** Getting out of the Military, I was missing this comradery.
- Man 2:** It's frustrating when you try and talk to people that don't understand.
- Man 3:** I still had the anger. I still had the addictions. But we didn't talk about that.
- Woman:** It came to a point where it's like, "Okay, I really need to talk to somebody about this."
- Man 4:** Family more or less encouraged me, you know, to go – go to the VA.
- Man 5:** It's okay to go get help. It's okay to talk to people. Because it takes true strength to ask for help.
- Narrator:** Hear Veterans' real stories of strength and recovery at maketheconnection.net [Link to *Make the Connection's* website].

[00:16:27] Music

[00:16:33] CLOSING MONOLOGUE:

(TI): A lot of connections were made there at *BourBiz* there at the, uh, MGM Grand. I want to thank Rafael Ortiz and Olivia Nunn for their time. I think – I think they both represented their unique organizations well at *BourBiz*. Again, this was my first event like this and I thought, again – I thought it was too loud and I didn't capture anything and, lo and behold, my – my gear didn't do so bad. So. So, what do you think? If I – if I go to something like this again, would you like another episode like this with even more content? Um. Would you like the – would you like to hear from those that participated in the panel discussions, those that participated in the – the – any kinds of competitions that they may have had, uh, the organizers, which in this case we will have in the near future. Is there – basically, is there value to you, the listeners, to this type of content? Let me know at <mailto:podcast@va.gov>. And as always, you can hit me up on anyone of my blogs at blogs.va.gov [Link to VA's official blog], or at Dept. Vet Affairs, US Department of Veteran's Affairs, on Twitter [Link to VA's Twitter page: <https://twitter.com/DeptVetAffairs>], Facebook [Link to VA's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/VeteransAffairs>], Instagram [Link to VA's Instagram page: <https://www.instagram.com/deptvetaffairs/>], YouTube [Link to VA's YouTube account:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/DeptVetAffairs>]. No matter the social media, you can find us with that blue checkmark. As always, thank you very much for listening. We will be back onto our normal schedule this Wednesday. Again, another new episode. See you then.

[00:17:44] Music

(Text Transcript Ends)