

Borne the Battle

Episode # 154

Benefits Breakdown – VA Center of Faith and Opportunity Initiative

<https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/63138/borne-battle-154-benefits-breakdown-va-center-faith-opportunity-initiative/>

(Text Transcript Follows)

[00:00:00] Music

[00:00:10] OPENING MONOLOGUE:

Tanner Iskra (TI):

Ahhh, let's get it! Wednesday, July 17th, 2019, *Borne the Battle*, brought to you by the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA). I am your host, Marine Corps Veteran, Tanner Iskra. I – uh, right before I recorded, I could – couldn't find my headphones and here they were, right in front of me. Uh, if you know anything about me, you're not surprised. Hope everyone outside of podcast land had a great week. Uh, I did. I drove by my soon-to-be new house and saw that the roof is on the house. Um, as you know, I've been – I've been talking about my – uh, new home that I'm currently building. Um, ninety days before you close and I'm currently prequal-ed. Roughly, ninety days before you close, around that time, you do a walk through before the drywall goes on – in. So, I got another month before that. When – now, as some homebuyers know, uh – when you buy a home that's currently on the market – uh, you should prequal and then start the loan process the moment your offer is accepted. Uh, building a home is a little different – um, I have to wait, I have to wait till it's – uh, ninety days from being completed before I can actually apply. So, it's just a little nerve-racking, that's all. But, like I said – uh, since this is a VA home loan on a new home buy – uh, I'm gonna keep you abreast of the entire process, so – so, hopefully, you all can learn and if I make a mistake, well, y'all are gonna know when I know and hopefully not make the same mistake. So, not much feedback from Episode 153. Uh, I've had – uh, some ratings but no reviews since the 4th of July. What a patriot, by the way, doing it on the 4th of July, mid – probably mid fireworks. However, we currently are up to fifty-five ratings and twenty-nine reviews for a total – grand total of eighty-four ratings and reviews. Ladies and Gentlemen, we are sixteen away from that bonus episode of Air Force Veteran, Adrian Cronauer of *Good Morning Vietnam* fame

interviewing the one, the only producer, actor, comedian, and Army Veteran, Mel Brooks. We get to a hundred, I'll drop that episode in a heartbeat. It's a good one. So, I got one press release today and a couple other bits of information. So, the first one is for immediate release, VA's VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC) Program marks tenth anniversary. The US Department of Veterans' Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) service, in June, celebrated a decade of the VetSuccess on Campus program – otherwise known as VSOC, which supports service members, Veterans, and eligible dependents as they complete their education and obtain viable careers. The VSOC program, which provides dedicated Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors on VSOC school locations to support eligible students, began as a pilot initiative at the University of South Florida in 2009. And since then, has expanded to support one hundred and four schools across the country. There's a quote from – uh, our Secretary Robert Wilkie talking about how great the VSOC program is. And then it says VSOC assists participants – that's a lot of sis – by helping to guide their career paths, reach educational and career targets and access their VA benefits. Last year, the VSOC program assisted over forty-four thousand participants in pursuit of their educational goals through on-campus benefits assistance and counseling. For more information on the VSOC program, visit www.benefits.va.gov/vocrehab/vsoc.asp [link to VSOCs webpage]. You know, I've never heard of this VSOC program and it sounds like, to me, another great opportunity for a benefits breakdown, if it's not already in the archives. I gotta check on that. And the other bit of information is a story from blogs.va.gov [link to blogs.va.gov]. Um, this August 26th through 29th, nearly two thousand VA and DoD care teams, leaders, allies, and subject matter experts from across the country will convene at the 2019 VA DoD suicide prevention conference in Nashville, Tennessee. Since its inception in 2004, this annual conference has been an important forum for sharing best practices, key research findings, and policy updates in the suicide prevention field. This year's conference theme is *Many Roles, One Mission*, which emphasizes that everyone has a role to play in preventing suicide among service members and Veterans. Guided by the National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide and the Department of Defense Strategy for Suicide Prevention, attendees of the VA DoD Suicide Prevention Conference will continue to build on the public health strategies that VA and the DoD apply at the facility, community, and state levels. To learn more about the efforts of VA's Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention,

visit https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention [Link to the VA's Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention website]. And if you look for this story, it is on blogs.va.gov. Just search for VA DoD announce 2019 suicide prevention conference and you can read the whole story. Alright, so this week's episode is a benefits breakdown episode. I'm gonna try and do one of these once a month since I saw how much feedback I got on – back in Episode 150 on the VA Home Loan. Uh, this week we're gonna talk about the VA Center of Faith and Opportunity Initiative. And, I'm just gonna – from now on I'm just gonna say Center of Faith for time's sake. Look, at some point, somebody got smart and realized that a lot of Veterans will not contact the VA on their own to learn about its benefits. Uh, I was one of 'em. Uh, that same somebody, and I don't really know who that somebody is, thought that the best way to reach some Veterans were through the local clergy and their communities. That's what the Center of Faith is. It's a resource for clergy within a community to learn about the resources for the Veteran part of their flock, if you will. Uh, the Center of Faith's mission is to engage, inform and educate faith based, nonprofit, and community – uh, slash, neighborhood organizations, and VA programs to better serve the needs of Veterans, their families, survivors, caregivers, and other beneficiaries. The current leader spearheading this initiative is their acting director. Uh, he's also a Marine Veteran, Conrad Washington. Uh, currently in seminary school, we sat down and talked with him and he explained how his career, combined with his faith – uh, eventually landed him at the VA Secretary's office and into this current role. And it's a pretty cool story, too. So, without further ado, let's get to breaking down the VA Center of Faith.

[00:07:04] Music

[00:07:11] INTERVIEW:

TI: Um, so Conrad, I see you in a meeting at least once a week. Um, but I don't know, like, what your official title is. I know it has something to do with faith and the VA. So – so, what is your official title?

Conrad Washington (CW): My official title is the Deputy Director for the Center for Faith and Opportunity Initiative here at the VA.

TI: What is that?

CW: Well, basically what our mission is, is to – uh, educate, engage, and inform faith-based nonprofit and community organizations about the VA resources – uh, that are available to them and their families and – uh, the Veterans and beneficiaries.

TI: Didn't know the VA got into – into, like – uh, faith-based – uh, outreach much.

CW: Yeah, the executive order – uh, was signed on May of 2018 – uh, changing our name – uh, to the Center for Faith but we initially – uh, stood up back in 2004 – uh, with the – uh, Bush administration – uh, and there are actually thirteen – uh, total federal agencies with Centers of Faiths. We're not the only show in town. Yeah.

TI: Gotcha. So, you – you have more Centers of Faith, pockets of Centers of Faith out there in the country?

CW: Well, no. What I mean by that is – uh, we have federal agencies. So, the VA is one federal agency. So, there are a total of thirteen federal agencies with offices – uh –

TI: Gotcha. Makes sense.

CW: With Centers of Faith, absolutely. Yeah.

TI: Gotcha.

CW: We collaborate very often.

TI: Okay.

CW: Yeah. Yeah.

TI: Gotcha. Gotcha. So, Conrad, fellow Marine as well –

CW: Yeah. Oorah

TI: Oorah.

CW: [Laughter]

TI: Um, what made you join the Marine Corps?

CW: So – uh, you know, growing up – uh, in Illinois, I – uh, was in college and – uh, got tired of – uh, hanging out and partying and so I – uh, left the – left the college and then after I left college, I actually – uh, joined the Marine Corps, 1989. Took me exactly two days to join, I walked into the recruiter's office one day and he said – uh, when do you want to leave. Uh, and I said tomorrow, and I left the day after Christmas – uh, 1989. So, that became my journey –

TI: Why – uh, why did you wanna leave so soon?

CW: Well, you know, Tanner, it's – uh –

TI: Two days.

CW: Yeah. Yeah. So. Uh, everyone has a journey and part of my – uh, journey was to – uh, find out – uh, what is the thing that I was designed to do. And – uh, when I was sitting there in college and hanging out and having fun and – uh, partially studying at the time – uh, I felt that – uh, wasn't my calling, right? And so – uh, I just wanted a bigger challenge and so – uh, my journey began when I joined the Marine Corps.

TI: So, you just looked at the Marine Corps sign and you were, like, that one?

CW: Well, I mean, I was in college, again, I – I loved the – uh – uh, the uniform of the Marines –

TI: Ah, okay. Okay.

CW: I like what they stood for. Uh, they were always the hardest, the toughest, and so, I said I wanna be a part of the most elite that I could at –

TI: Mhmm.

CW: At the time. So – uh, yeah, that drove me to the Marine Corps.

TI: Understood.

CW: Yeah, yeah.

TI: When you started, you know, there's a lot of jobs in the gun club –

CW: Yes.

TI: Um, but you started like myself. You started in admin, correct?

CW: That's right. That's right.

TI: And – and then you later moved into some other MOS's, like myself. Um, while you were in, who was your – either your best friend or your greatest mentor?

CW: In the Marine Corps?

TI: In the Marine Corps.

CW: Wow. That's a good question. So, I – I – I, you know, I think that's a – uh, a tough question because I've met – uh, a lot of leaders – uh, who I consider – uh, my mentor – uh, throughout my career. Uh, and I think there were numerous ones.

TI: Yeah.

CW: Uh, and, you know – uh, I would say that – uh, if I had to throw a name out there – uh, which I don't like throwing names out, but – uh, I would say that Sergeant Major Kent – uh, was a great mentor for me. He's a –

TI: Sergeant Major in the Marine Corps?

CW: Yes.

TI: Mmm.

CW: Uh, I knew him – uh – uh, before he became a Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps. Uh, when I was a Marine Corps drill instructor, I knew him and – uh, he used to always shed information and shed knowledge on us on how to conduct yourself. Not just as a Marine or a drill instructor but as a man. Uh, and so I –

TI: Mmm.

CW: Really appreciated – uh, his – uh, his counsel. Yeah.

TI: Absolutely.

CW: Yeah.

TI: Sergeant Major Kent was the – uh, was the Sergeant Major when I was up at the Pentagon.

CW: Yeah.

TI: And – uh, his driver and I went to sergeant's course together.

CW: Oh wow.

TI: And so, last memory that I have of Sergeant Major Kent –

CW: Mmm.

TI: Is his Dodge – his Dodge Charger driving through the Pentagon parking lot.

CW: Mmm.

TI: And, it, you know, I think it had the – the license plate that said Sergeant Major Kent or something –

CW: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

TI: So, you knew it was him.

CW: Yeah, yeah.

TI: Or it was like – uh, I can't remember what – what, I can't remember Sergeant Major, like, 37th or what – whatever one he was. 14th –

CW: Mhmm.

TI: Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps. Um, but when it rolled down his window it was his driver. And this was like the last week and he was in the backseat just living it up.

CW: Mmmmm.

TI: Letting his driver drive his personal Charger –

CW: Yeah.

TI: So, that's my last memory of Sergeant Major Kent.

CW: Mmm.

TI: It – it was a pretty good one.

CW: Yeah, he's a good – good guy.

TI: So, you started out as admin, but you also held a couple different jobs in the Marine Corps. What – what – now you – you became a drill instructor –

CW: That's right.

TI: Did a couple other things, what were some of the things you did in the Marine Corps?

CW: So, I was an administrator – uh, I was also a – uh, drill instructor, senior drill instructor – uh, where I was responsible for the drill instructors and the recruits, right?

TI: Yeah.

CW: Uh, then also – uh, down the line I became an instructor at the formal schools because of that – uh drill instructor experience and the education I acquired – uh, so I was able to facilitate courses at the – uh, at the academy. Uh, Camp Hansen – uh, in Okinawa, Japan. So, that was a great experience as well.

TI: Okay, yeah.

CW: Yeah. The train – the trainer – uh, specifically said I was good.

TI: Got you. Um, now you retired, correct?

CW: I did. I did retire.

TI: Did you retire out of DC?

CW: So, sort of, I retired – uh – uh, out of Fort Belvoir – uh, so Fort Belvoir, Virginia was the base that I retired from. I came in '89; 2009 I retired. Uh – right at Fort Belvoir, there's a Marine Corps intelligence school – uh, right there at Fort Belvoir – uh –

TI: Interesting.

CW: Yeah, yeah. So, I – I was running that – uh, as the administrator there and then – uh, then I punched my ticket and – uh, became a civilian. [Laughter]

TI: [Laughter]

CW: Good times.

TI: So, you got out in 2009?

CW: That's right.

TI: That was right in the middle of the recession.

CW: It was.

TI: What was your transition like?

CW: Yeah, interesting you ask that. So – uh, I was able to – uh, secure employment right after I retired, for about a year. Uh, and then I found myself unemployed – uh, for about – uh, four or five months.

TI: What were you doing as your first job? What was your first gig?

CW: My first gig – uh, right there in the office, actually, the – [laughter] doing the same thing I did while I was in – uh –

TI: Gotcha.

CW: They transitioned it to a civilian job. So – uh, I was blessed. Uh, but – uh, again, the contract – uh, was competed for – uh, didn't win the contract as a result – uh, I was unemployed – uh, for those months – uh, and that was probably one of the – uh, biggest – uh, challenges I've had – uh, as an adult – uh, just because when you're working all the time and used to receiving, not just pay, but just used to being engaged and not having that – uh, that assignment, so to speak – uh –

TI: There's always that next goal –

CW: Yeah.

TI: That next rank –

CW: Yeah.

TI: That – that next thing that –

CW: Yeah, yeah.

TI: You can, in – in the military.

CW: Yeah, that was tough for me, that was an adjustment.

TI: Mmm.

CW: Yeah, yeah.

TI: So, what – I mean, so you were – so you were unemployed. What – what – what was go – what was happening after that? Like, what – how did you become from – how did you become from unemployed to employed?

CW: Yeah. So, I was unemployed, and I was applying to, probably, over three hundred positions – uh, in the federal government. And I would get interviews – uh, I would get – uh, referred but not hired or not selected.

TI: Yeah.

CW: Top candidate, but I just never landed the job. And, so – uh, what happened, I actually took a position as a security guard, right?

TI: Oh wow.

CW: And this was after I retired, serving combat in 2004 – uh, Twentynine Palms, 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines, and – uh, had multiple degrees but – uh, I took a job as a security guard at the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency – uh, in Springfield, Virginia. Um, and – uh, the facility was just being – uh, built up and so I had my hardhat on and my steel toed shoes and – uh, you know, it was – was – it was kind of daunting because I knew I had – uh – uh, skills to do more than what I was doing, but – uh –

TI: Sure.

CW: Just because the recession and just – uh, I believe that it was kind of like my journey, right? God – God had a journey for everyone, right? In my view, so –

TI: Absolutely.

CW: Uh, that was part of my journey, and – uh, one day I was – uh, coming home from the security job and – uh, I got an – got an email from someone – uh, who worked at a company called – uh, militaryhire.com and so they wanted to hire me. And so, they looked at my background and they saw all the training –

TI: Out of the blue? Like, did you have your job – did you have your resume posted somewhere? How did they find you?

CW: Yeah, I had my resume out there at militaryhire.com.

TI: Okay.

CW: So, they – they – uh, guess used key words, and so as a result, at the interview went well, and – uh, the interesting thing about this story, Tanner, is that the same building that I was a security guard in, is the same building that I was the – uh, national trainer for the entire agency on security education and awareness. So – uh –

TI: You went from –

CW: That was pretty unique.

TI: You went from a security guard there to actually training all security guards.

CW: That's right.

TI: Awesome.

CW: Well, not just security guards, but – uh, federal employees.

TI: Sure.

CW: So, it was – um, high level and – uh, a lot of people said I know you from somewhere. And I said, yeah, I used to be the guy down there [laughter] at the security gate, you know. And so –

TI: [Laughter]

CW: You know – uh, it’s amazing – uh, kind of – kind – kind of a – uh, interesting story. Uh, and from there, I – uh, I worked that job for about three years. And then I came into the – uh, Department of Veterans’ Affairs in 2013. Uh, where I worked in the corporate scene executive management office – uh, for four and a half years, right?

TI: Mmm.

CW: Uh, and I don’t know if I ever told this story but if we have time, I’ll share with you.

TI: Absolutely! As – that’s the great thing about podcasts is that there’s always for interesting content.

CW: Okay. I’ll share with you that – uh, during my time in – uh, in SEMO, here in the VA – uh, it – when I came in 2013, I actually felt like I was being called to go do different things. I wanted to – to go work somewhere else, but I didn’t know where.

TI: Yeah.

CW: You know, that was but I knew that my time was expiring – uh, in SEMO just because I started to get antsy, you know. And meanwhile, during this time I was called to the ministry, I’m in seminary, so I’m preaching, and teaching God’s word and I just felt a strong –

TI: And this was on your off, like not normal job. –

CW: Yes. Right.

TI: You – you were also as a – a pastor somewhere.

CW: Preacher, yes.

TI: As a preacher.

CW: Yeah, yeah. So, I was like, okay – I – I – I’m gonna be something but I don’t know what that is and so my wife and I visited another state and – uh, in visiting that state, we ran across a Marine who was selling homes. And – uh, he said, hey, you would be a great salesman. You have the gift of the gab. I said, well, I’m a preacher. He said, oh, you – you’d be good, you – you oughta sell homes. And we loved the state that we wanted to move to. And so – uh, I said, hey, I’m gonna apply for that position. Cause I had no qualms with leaving the government because I felt that I was being called to something different.

TI: Mmm.

CW: And so, I applied for the position. Actually, I was interviewed before I applied for the position – uh, which is kinda odd. Uh, but – uh, long story short, I did not get the position – uh, part of the requirement for the position was to buy a pickup truck because you were selling homes. You needed a pickup truck. And I was like, I don’t even like pickup trucks.

TI: Why do you need a pickup truck to sell homes?

CW: So, you had two tracks in the – uh, in the housing – uh, one track was to sell homes and the other one was the – uh, project manager.

TI: Okay.

CW: So, I was gonna sell homes, but I also wanted to be a project manager. So, you would go around to the various home sites and inspect them and – and – and different things. So, you would require – they required a – a pickup truck. Yeah.

TI: For, like tools and stuff?

CW: Tools and different things you had to do. You had to carry – uh, equipment sometimes, - uh, and – and things like that.

TI: Okay.

CW: Uh, so – uh, but again, I –

TI: Interesting.

CW: Yeah it is, but I – I didn't even like pickup trucks but –

TI: [Laughter]

CW: [Laughter] Yeah, so I – I didn't get the position and I'm scratching my head, you know. Asking, why, what's going on. And – uh, a few weeks later – uh, a guy who worked at the office of the secretary put my name in the hat for a position and asked would I be interested. And I said, well, you know – I'm – I'm not too certain because a lot of – uh, confusion – uh, in that office right now – uh, at that time.

TI: Yeah.

CW: Uh, but – uh, I – I – I prayed about it and I – uh, I accepted the – the opportunity to – uh, to compete – uh, which I did. And I was hired, it was a lateral move. Uh, and then – uh, as I – uh, went to the office of the secretary – uh, to work. Uh, I worked for – uh, a – a woman who – uh, had very – uh, high goals and very fast pace and – uh, and so I stopped and said, well Ma'am, I'll work for you. I – I – I'm loyal to you, but I need you to know that what you're asking me to do – uh, what you want me to do is really outside of the parameters of the position description. Uh, this is only because of the experience that I gained in – uh, that office called SEMO for four and a half years.

TI: Yeah.

CW: And she said, well, let's find out what we have to do. And so – uh, they changed the grade of the – uh, of the position and I was promoted – uh, based on my experience and education – uh, and knowledge. And so that happened. And then – uh, as we were moving around to various offices, learning about the staff offices – uh, we came across the office called the Center for Faith here in the VA. And so – uh, obviously – uh, you know, being a licensed minister, preaching in the seminary, I said, wow, I would love to be in this office. This is –

TI: Sparked an interest.

CW: Yeah, this is like – this is cool. And so – uh, just so happened, they had a vacancy and – uh, and here I am, you know. And then the guy who ran this office, Mr. Dillard – uh, he actually was called – uh, to run the – uh, Center for Minority Veterans – uh, which gave me an opportunity to really – uh, put my stamp on this office and I'm very grateful to be here.

TI: That's awesome.

CW: Yeah.

TI: Um, one –

CW: [Laughter]

TI: What car do you drive if you're not a truck guy?

CW: [Laughter]

TI: I'm a truck guy.

CW: [Laughter] You're a truck guy?

TI: Yeah, I'm a truck guy.

CW: Yeah, I'm a sports car guy.

TI: Gotcha. What do you drive?

CW: [Laughter] I drive a old sports car. How's that?

TI: Okay.

CW: Yeah, yeah.

TI: Okay.

CW: Yeah, yeah. Old sports car.

TI: Ford? Chevy? What kind – what are you? Ford/ Chevy guy?

CW: Nah, it's – it's –

TI: Dodge?

CW: Yeah, it's one of those foreign cars but it's not all that sporty. It's – it's – it's okay.

TI: Okay.

CW: Yeah.

TI: Okay.

CW: Yeah.

TI: It's a – it's a work in progress.

CW: It's a work in progress. Right. Ten –

TI: Absolutely.

CW: Ten-year-old – ten-year-old car.

TI: Gotcha, gotcha.

CW: It's ten years old. Yeah.

TI: Gotcha. And – and two, what is your current mission? What's your current drive? What's – what's your current focus? In the – the – the Center of Faith.

CW: So, Tanner, I – I – my current focus, right now, is to reach as many Veterans as I can, you know. We have twenty million Veterans in the United States – uh, and I wanna reach as many as I can through the faith based nonprofit and community organizations. Linking them to all the services that the VA has. Uh, that's one thing. The second thing I will say is that – uh, based on the twenty Veterans we have, per day, taking their lives – uh, that's an astronomical – uh, number –

TI: Absolutely.

CW: And I think that – uh, we can make a difference when we work together at the federal, state, and local level. Uh, and I think that it's a all-hands-on-deck and so I'm working with Dr. Keita Franklin, who's the Suicide Prevention Executive Director for the VA – uh, on how we can – uh, roll out – uh, initiatives. And the President signed, recently, March 5th, an executive order – uh, roadmap – uh, which instituted a task force – uh, and – uh, Secretary Wilkie is the coach here and he's assigned this Wendy Lasko from the – uh, Suicide Prevention office to – uh, to be the Executive – Direct – Director to head that up. Uh, and we're working her so that we can work together to ensure that we – uh, meet the needs of our Veterans and their families to – to eliminate suicide – uh, because it's – uh, it's something that's preventable. Uh, you know? And I think when we work together at every level – uh, we have a shot at – uh, at – at diminishing it.

TI: Gotcha. So that's – uh, so that's your mission. What are some of the things your office is doing to achieve that mission?

CW: So, a couple things as I mentioned, we – we're – we're part of, not so much the task force, but working with – uh, the roadmap that the President signed and the executive order. Uh, we're also on the consortium – uh, that Dr. Keita Franklin has. Which – uh, has a bunch of – uh, offices in Centers to work together to eliminate suicide. Uh, we have numerous events throughout the entire year – uh, which we – uh, actually – uh, coordinated suicide prevention training coordinator – uh, with the VHA, at every event that we have to bring awareness to suicide prevention, so the clergy are being trained nationwide, as well. Uh, so we just did a number of things to – to help with suicide, homelessness, and various issues, and just make sure that our Veterans and their family and beneficiaries know that – uh, the VA, the second largest federal agency –

TI: Mmm.

CW: Has something for you, that can change your life and help you.

TI: What are some of the things – what are some of the things that your office is doing to – for that outreach? How are you able to connect to that clergy? What are some of the things that – uh, your office is doing?

CW: Yeah, so as I mentioned, part of the – the – the connection or the relationship with that clergy, first is – uh, here at the Center for Faith, things are relational.

TI: Mmm.

CW: Uh, that means that – uh, you know, people want to hear, touch, and feel you. Uh, being in ministry, out – outside the government, I understand that. Uh, so that when I speak to pastors and clergy – uh, I make it my business to listen. Uh, because they are in the service business and oh, by the way, so is the VA. Right? So, there's a connection there.

TI: Gotcha.

CW: And then, we – uh, we – we ask and – uh, I really – uh – uh, accept – uh, their receptiveness to have – uh, the suicide prevention training – uh, for them, so they can understand – uh, the different steps that – uh, that go into a Veteran – uh, contemplating taking their own life.

TI: Some of the signs.

CW: That's right. Signs and all – and all that. Absolutely. And what to do. And so – uh, that's the second thing. The third thing is, I wanna make sure that when we connect to the clergy, that they know they have a place to go – uh, where's their local VA medical center? We wanna be able to help them connect – uh, with that VA medical center, CBOC, so that they are well informed of all the – uh, uh, resources for them to help that Veteran and their family.

TI: So, you help them make the clergy aware of the – the local VA medical centers, some of the –

CW: That's right.

TI: Some of the facilities that are –

CW: That's right

TI: Some of the resources that are available to them –

CW: Yeah.

TI: That's pretty cool.

CW: Yeah.

TI: Um, Conrad, what's one thing that you learned in service that you use today?

CW: Hm. Organization. A lot of things, you know. Um, you know, the word leadership gets thrown around a lot. But if you really – uh, look it up in the dictionary, it says that it has – a leader’s a person who has the ability to influence others. And so – uh, that’s much different than a manager. And so – uh, growing up in the Marines Corps, I learned how to influence people and – uh, I’m not the only one. There are some great leaders.

TI: Yeah.

CW: Military and nonmilitary. Uh, so the greatest thing I learned was how to be a leader and to be organized. Uh, there’s the six Ps you may be familiar with. [Laughter]

TI: [Laughter]

CW: So, I use that daily to ensure that – uh, you know – uh, I don’t miss the mark, but I do miss the mark because I’m not perfect. But I work hard at – at what I do, and I care about what I do. So – uh, I would say leadership.

TI: I – I see that you care about what –

CW: Yeah.

TI: Every time that you – uh, you speak in our – our meetings cause I – I, obviously I gravitate to you, cause –

CW: Yeah.

TI: Uh, by the way you speak about what you’re speaking about.

CW: Yeah. I – I –

TI: Um –

CW: I appreciate that.

TI: That was one of the reasons that I said, hey, let’s talk.

CW: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

TI: Let's – let's have a conversation.

CW: Yeah, yeah, I appreciate that.

TI: So, Conrad, I'm a clergyman, I'm someone – uh, of faith, could be any faith, and I wanna reach out to you. What are some of the ways that I can hit you up and find out some resources about the VA?

CW: The first thing I would say is that, get on the website, www.va.gov [link to the VA website], pretty easy.

TI: Okay.

CW: Uh, once you get into that website, you can navigate and find the Center for Faith, reach out to us, we would love to connect with you so that we can partner with you. Uh, and that partnership can mean – uh, a lot of different things. Uh, but at the end of the day we want to help you to help the Veteran and their families.

TI: Gotcha. You're also on the road, too, a lot, right? You got some things coming up?

CW: We do. Uh, we do. Uh, I'm on the road – uh, next week, going to Illinois for the National Catholic – uh, Conference. Uh, and then I'm going to – uh, partner with the church in – uh, Nashville, Tennessee. Uh, and then, also, I'm going later to partner in – uh, in – uh, Iowa. Uh, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, for an event that we have. So, we're on the road doing a lot of things and – uh, we're looking forward to it.

TI: What are some of the events? Is the – is the events put on by the VA or is the events put on by the local community? Um, basically, how can I find your schedule? [Laughter]

CW: Yeah. Well, we don't have it posted, but – uh, if you reach out – uh, we – uh, I would love to share it with you. And – and, basically, these events are something that – uh, we initiated through our partnerships – uh, with – uh, with those – uh, external organizations – uh, so that we can – uh, do great things for the Veterans.

TI: Gotcha. Some of the establi – some of the relationships that you have already established, pretty much.

CW: Yes.

TI: Gotcha. Gotcha. Gotcha

CW: Yes. Yes.

TI: Cool. Conrad, what's one nonprofit or Veteran in the Veteran space that you think is doing good things right now? That ex – excites you?

CW: Wow. [Laughter] Well –

TI: I'm sure you run – I'm sure – I'm sure with your job –

CW: Yeah.

TI: You run into a lot.

CW: Yeah. You know, it – there are many organizations that are doing – uh, outstanding things. Uh, small and large. I would say from a large standpoint – uh, I love the Salvation of Army. Uh, because they are – uh, they're all over.

TI: Absolutely.

CW: And they have such a – such a impact on so many people. Uh, and after working with them, seeing how their hierarchy – uh, is and – and – and their mission, and – and – uh, how faithful they are to what they're doing. I would – uh, I would say the Salvation Army would be – uh, who I would think of – uh, right off the bat.

TI: As a big one?

CW: Yeah. Yeah.

TI: Gotcha. What is – what is one that maybe someone might not know about?

CW: Uh, there's something called the Warrior's Journey. Uh, and that's a – uh, you can research it, you can google it. The Warrior's Journey, I met – uh, these gentleman at – uh, at the round table I had in February – uh, they – uh, actually provide services to Veterans and their families. Uh, and – uh, information as well. Uh, so I think that, probably, is one that people are not aware of, but they are very effective and – uh, very – uh, very good place to go to for resource –

TI: Gotcha.

CW: As well.

TI: They – they're – they work on connecting Veterans to resources.

CW: That's right. That's right.

TI: Gotcha.

CW: Yeah. the Warrior's Journey.

TI: Conrad, is there anything else that you'd like to add that I haven't asked? Anything that's important to share to our listeners?

CW: I would just say that – uh, you know, who – whoever's listening, whether you're a Veteran or someone who – uh, wants to help Veterans, I would just say reach out to your local – uh, VA medical center. Because you may be surprised at the resources that are available to you.

[00:28:47] Music

[00:28:52] PSA:

Woman 1:

I chose to be an outreach worker because of the fact that I've been there. I know what it is to be homeless. When I utilized my VI Bill to get my house, that was like, the biggest thing that ever happened to me in my whole life. Because they helped me get a piece of the American dream.

Woman 2:

Choose VA today. For more information, visit VA.gov.

[00:29:22] Music

[00:29:27] CLOSING MONOLOGUE:

TI:

So, I hope through that entire interview you got, like, the main ways how a clergy leader can get involved with the Center of Faith. Through partnerships, outreach events, and resources, like handouts and – and – and the like. For more information on the VA Center of Faith and Opportunity Initiative, you can go to va.gov/cfbpartnerships/index.asp [link to Center for Faith and Opportunity Initiative webpage] or email them directly at vapartnerships@va.gov or you can call them at 202-461-7689. Again, this is a resource for clergy within your local area. And the Center of Faith recently had a pretty successful outreach event in Lebanon, Tennessee – uh, earlier this month, on July 1st. Uh, and you can see photos from that right on this episode's blog at blogs.va.gov [Link to the VA's podcast page]. Just search *Borne the Battle* in the search bar. Search for Episode 154 and it's right there. So, this week's *Borne the Battle* Veteran of the Week is Army Veteran Sydney Hunnicutt. During World War II, Hunnicutt was drafted into the U.S. Army and deployed to the Philippines with the 63rd Infantry Regiment, 6th Infantry Division. During the Battle of Luzon, Hunnicutt fought the Japanese and was shot in his left hand. He lost two fingers and was later awarded a Purple Heart. Recently, the McCurtain County VA Clinic and the members of the local community gathered in Idabel, or Idabel [pronouncing it differently], I'm gonna go with Idabel, Oklahoma to celebrate Sydney Hunnicutt's 102nd birthday. The VA clinic staff presented him birthday cards and he was presented a gift bag on behalf of VA Voluntary Service. Hunnicutt has been a patient at the clinic since it opened in 2017, and Dr. Jose Gomez has served as his primary care physician. Thank you for your service, Sydney, and

congratulations on that 102nd birthday. That's it for this week's episode. If you, yourself, would like to nominate a *Borne the Battle* Veteran of the Week, you can. Just email us at podcast@va.gov. Include a short write up – uh, let us know why you would like to see him or her as the *Borne the Battle* Veteran of the Week. Uh, for more stories on Veterans and Veteran benefits, check out our website, blogs.va.gov, follow the VA on social media: Twitter , [Link to the VA's Twitter page: https://twitter.com/DeptVetAffairs?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor] Instagram [Link to the VA's Instagram page: <https://www.instagram.com/deptvetaffairs/?hl=en>], Facebook [Link to the VA's Facebook page: [Facebook.com/VeteransAffairs](https://www.facebook.com/VeteransAffairs)], YouTube [Link to the VA's YouTube page: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCBvOzPLmbzjtpX-Htstp2vw>], RallyPoint [Link to RallyPoint: <https://www.rallypoint.com>]. Dept Vet Affairs, US Department of Veterans' Affairs, no matter the social media, you can always find us with that blue checkmark. I will not be here next week. I am going back to Washington, I am going on vacation so for the next two episodes, you are gonna get the vacation version of *Borne the Battle* and trust me, you're not gonna wanna miss those either. I've saved a couple of rounds for those weeks and they're some pretty, pretty, pretty good interviews so stick around. Thank you again for listening and we will see you right here, next week.

[00:32:36] Music

[00:33:09] AFTER THE SHOW:

TI:

So, if you're still listening, this is the very first *Borne the Battle, After the Show* – Show. That's right, *After the Show* – Show. Uh, Conrad and I were talking here and – uh, he told me a story about his time with Sergeant Major Kent and I thought it was so good – um, that if you're still listening after all the music and after the whole *Borne the Battle* Show – uh, you get this little bit of bonus, so without further ado, Conrad, what's your story about Sergeant Major Kent?

CW: Well, it's – it's – it's a short story but – uh, you know, during my time as a Marine Corps Drill Instructor, I worked for Sergeant Major Kent. He was the – uh, Sergeant Major of the Recruit Training Regiment at the time. And so, he sent me home because that day I was kind of – uh, angry, I think that's a light word to put it, at the recruits that I was – uh, responsible for. So, I had them go outside with their mattresses on top of their head and go in circles and just repeat, in unison, we stink, we stink. Uh, because I was pretty – uh, pretty upset at 'em, I can't remember why. And – uh, lo and behold – um, uh, that's obviously

TI: And they – they weren't saying we stink. But that – we'll keep it – we'll keep it PG.

CW: [Laughter] Yeah, yeah, we'll keep it PG.

TI: Yeah.

CW: And so – uh, obviously that's a inappropriate – uh, not the type of thing we wanna do, and so Sergeant Major called me in the office, said, hey, what are you doing. And he sent me home – uh, to kinda clear my head. Uh, and could have been a career – uh, ruiner, but – uh, it – it wasn't. He – uh, again, provided leadership and – uh, kept me away from the situation, but – uh, yeah, it was good times back then. [Laughter]

TI: [Laughter] Different times back then than they are now. I'm sure, as a drill instructor. But – uh, that's a great story. So, listeners, if you like stuff like this, let me know, let me know you listened to this, cause this is on the very, very back end of the podcast. So, if you're listening to this, man, I'm – I'm counting you as a loyal, dedicated listener. Uh, and just email me at podcast@va.gov. Let me know you listened to this. Let me know if you liked it or not. And if you did – uh, I'll start doing more and more of these. Thanks for listening, see you next week.

(End of Transcription Text)