

Borne the Battle

Episode # 167

Dr. Albert Weed- Green Beret Medic, Army Medical Officer, VA Surgeon

<https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/67181/borne-battle-167-dr-albert-weed-army-medical-officer-surgeon/>

(Text Transcript Follows)

[00:00:00] Music

[00:00:10] OPENING MONOLOGUE:

Tanner Iskra (TI):

Let's get it- Wednesday, October 16th, 2019. *Borne the Battle*, brought to you by the Department of Veteran Affairs. The podcast that focuses on inspiring Veterans stories and puts a highlight on important resources, offices, and benefits for our Veterans. I am your host, Marine Corps Veteran Tanner Iskra. Hope you had a good week outside of podcast land. I'm personally curious to see how this home inspection I recently had is going to go at the closing of my house this week. The inspector found some major and minor issues. However, I think installing some things not to manufacturer specifications is kinda major, especially things like- hm, the roof. The things that are listed as major issues- I'm sure I can get all of them fixed before closing and things that they called minor- like the roof- I, at least, want a plan to cure (that's why they say in contractor's speak- my wife tells me that) in writing at closing. I don't know if that's going to work or not. It's coming up, but we'll just have to wait and see. Uh, it's going to be after this episode. If you have ever dealt with anything like this on a new home build or have a suggestion or two or some knowledge to share with the community- please, email me at podcast@va.gov. If you want, maybe we can read your suggestions on next week's episode, so we can continue to spread the knowledge throughout the community. In addition to the walk through, the inspection, and the closing this week- over the past weekend, I also went to Irreverent Warriors DC Silkies Hike. It was a twenty-two-mile hike around the DC area. Everyone wore Silkies. Everyone wore packs. It was on a whim. Uh, I was interviewed for their podcast- 21 Gun- and they mentioned, "Hey, you gonna come out to the Silkie hike?" I said, "Sure, why not." That's how I spent- that was my own recognition of World Mental Health Day, which was on October 10th. We're gonna talk about that later in the episode. Uh, but that is what I did- I hiked half of the- half of the program. I had another event I had to get to, but I can tell you I wish I was there for the entire time. It was a great event and full of great people. Halfway through, we

stopped at the World War II Memorial and- uh- got with an honor flight and- you know- met some World War II, Vietnam, Cold War Veterans. We got to shake their hands- [inaudible]- interacting with those different eras. It was really, really a great event. I think the most powerful moment was when we were at the Lincoln Memorial Steps and- um- Irreverent Warriors- everyone there got to say the Irreverent Warriors' mission which is to bring Veterans together using humor and camaraderie to improve mental health and stop Veteran suicides- that was the mission. Of course, the Marine delegation and our silkies and our- and our- and our helmets and gas masks and camelbacks- uh- started- started shouting out the Marine Corps hymn, right. Overall, it was a great event. I can't wait to go to the next one. Once again, that was a Silkie hike put on by the nonprofit Irreverent Warriors and- uh- and- uh- we're gonna have a couple of their representatives on the show and we can learn more about the program. No reviews, ratings, or emails from last week's episode. Wah- wah. Couple comments, though. [Inaudible] One from a man named Abraham- "No one can really go far without hard work and vision." My sentiments exactly. One blog on blogs.va.gov that did get a ton of comments was the Games for Grunts story by our colleague Tim Hudack. Now, Games for Grunts is a program by a nonprofit called Operations Supply Drop, which gets free game codes from the gaming companies- from gaming companies- mainly Xbox and Steam. So far, there's no PS4- I think we're on 4- on there right now and they distribute these keys- uh- to veterans. We get the word out, like many in the Veteran community and there are some interesting- uh- comments on that blog. If you haven't yet, check it out. It has a very, very interesting conversation. Couple news releases this week: this first one says, "For immediate release, the VA Board of Veteran Appeals makes history with record-breaking year in 2019. The US Department of Veterans Affairs' Board of Veteran Appeals surpassed last year's record high output for decisions. The board officially dispatched ninety-five thousand eighty-nine decisions for Veterans and their families for fiscal year 2019- the largest number of decisions in the board's history. That is five thousand more decisions than the goal and eleven percent more than the board's decision output in 2018, the previous record high." There's a quote by the Secretary and he says, "This was in addition to implementing Appeals Modernization" and we're going to have a Benefits Breakdown on that very, very soon. Excited to bring you that one- that episode. "Undergoing a reorganization with addition of new leaders across the organization, taking over all hearing schedule and testing- virtual tele-hearings. Okay and the second one says, "For immediate release, VA recognizes World Mental Health Day 2019. The US Department of Veterans Affairs is joining organizations, communities, leaders, and

mental health professionals to observe World Mental Health Day, which was on October 10th. This year's theme is mental health promotion and suicide prevention. VAs urging all Veterans, service members, friends, and family to learn about the resources and support available to those experiencing signs and symptoms of a mental health condition and to help prevent suicide among Veterans. There's a quote by the Secretary and it says, "Every forty seconds, someone dies by suicide somewhere around the world. VA and the World Federation of Health Mental Health (WFMH) want everyone to know that mental health treatment is effective, recovery is possible, and suicide is preventable. Join VA and the WFMH in taking forty seconds for action. Your actions may provide the encouragement a loved one needs to seek help or even help prevent a suicide attempt. Here are a few ways to participate: explore the Veteran's Crisis Line and the suicide prevention links to learn about the many ways you can be there for a Veteran in need. Visit maketheconnection.net to watch videos of over five hundred Veterans from every service era and branch and we've interviewed one for the show- his name was David Lucier. He was a previous guest who shared their stories of coping with major life events, overcoming mental health challenges, and finding a new sense of purpose. Then, share one of these inspiring stories with a Veteran or loved one. Check out mentalhealth.va.gov for more information and resources on a variety of mental health topics and conditions, including suicide risk, anxiety, depression, and more. Connect with Coaching and to Care- a free telephone service for family members, friends, and loved ones of Veterans who may need mental health support. The hours of operation are Monday to Friday, from 8AM-8PM. Call 1-888-823-7458 to get started and as always, if you are a Veteran in Crisis or are concerned about a Veteran, the Veteran's Crisis Line is here to help. Call 1-800-273-8255 and press one or you can send a text to 838-255 or you can chat online and again, I'll always leave those links in the blog description. To learn more about VA's Mental Health programs, you can always go to mentalhealth.va.gov. Alright, from a Special Forces Medic to Army Medical Officer to VA Surgeon. This week's guest has an interesting career path, to say the least. He has four- I counted them- forty- two DD2-14s. He just couldn't get enough, I guess. He's had some pretty interesting stops along the way- from peace keeping in the forest to swimming in Saddam's pool in the green zone. So, let's dive in! See what I did there- hm- and find out if deployed army medics and doctors are really like *M*A*S*H*. So, without further ado, I bring to you Army Veteran Dr. Albert Weed- yes, Dr. Weed- yes, I know. Enjoy.

[00:09:21] Music

[00:09:27] INTERVIEW:

- (TI): Dr. Weed, you have to have some funny Veteran anecdotes from the first time that you meet them and they find out that they have a Dr. Weed. [Laughter]
- (Dr. Albert Weed): [Laughter] Well, there are some patients who appreciate it more than others. Um- you know- I tell them that- you know- if this VA thing doesn't work, then I'll move to Denver
- (TI): [Laughter]
- (AW): But- uh- I get a couple comments from some of them.
- (TI): There ya go. Um- so- uh- Dr. Weed, you're an Army Veteran.
- (AW): Yes, that's correct.
- (TI): When and where did you decide that the Army was the right career path for you?
- (AW): Oh, when did I decide it was the right career path? I'm not sure, but I enlisted in the Army out of high school. My father was in the Army for many years- served in Vietnam, was in the Reserves, and by that time, was a Command Sergeant Major-
- (TI): Okay.
- (AW): -and he eventually retired in 2003 or so after forty-two years. Um-
- (TI): Wow.
- (AW): So, we had a military history- or at least he was certainly in the Reserves at the time. He was kind of pushing me a little bit to- to consider joining the Army. I remember one night he- he- uh- invited the recruiter home for dinner.
- (TI): [Laughter] Oh, man.
- (AW): But it was really- it was really- one of my- one of my best friends growing up who had decided to join the Army- um- and so I- so-

(TI): Okay.

(AW): -he was in a delayed entry program and I went up and hung out with some in that program and kind of- that kind of sealed the deal, I guess.

(TI): Got the bug there- um- so, you said your dad retired in 2003?

(AW): I want to say 2003. Sometime around that time frame, yeah.

(TI): So, you guys served at the same time together.

(AW): We did. We actually- um- he- uh- he was in the 11th Special Forces Group, which I later joined. Um- so he was- he actually came and was able to jump at my jump school's graduation jump. So, he let me out the door at my graduation jump at jump school.

(TI): [Laughter]

(AW): And then we- uh- you know, he had some different things he was doing and then- um- in- so I was in a Special Forces company out of [inaudible] Hill in 199- 1988-1994 and then I left there to go to medical school. Um- I took my commission and left the unit and then he actually came in to be the Sergeant Major of the unit- like the following year.

(TI): [Laughter] Lost one weed, got the other.

(AW): That's right.

(TI): Sprouting weeds, I could do this all day.

(AW): Yup.

(TI): Um- [laughter]- uh- so, let's talk about your journey to eventually become a medic and a doctor.

(AW): Sure.

(TI): So, you started out in the infantry, correct?

(AW): I started out in the infantry- I was in 11 Charlie which are the mortarmen.

(TI): Okay.

(AW): Served with the 82nd Airborne Division-um- went to Ranger School during that time and then- uh- basically, I was planning on getting out and going to college, which was my original plan with the GI Bill and the Army College Fund.

(TI): Yeah, before- before you get there, talk to me about your deployment to Egypt in 1986. What was that all about?

(AW): Okay, so, when I got to the 82nd, they put us in the various units. The unit I was in- the 2nd of the 504 Infantry Division- Infantry Regiment-

(TI): Mhm.

(AW): -was going- was slated to go to the Sinai Desert on peacekeeping duty-

(TL): Okay.

(AW): So, the Multinational Force and Observers peacekeeping.

(TI): Interesting.

(AW): So, we left- I want to say I was the last group out- we left in May of- at the end of May or early June and we were supposed to be there for six months. I guess we left earlier in May, but- uh- I know it was after Memorial Day- um- so it's when we left and we were supposed to be there for six months and- um- we were replacing- you know, we went in and spent six months sitting on a checkpoint in the Sinai Desert, down at the very tip if you look at the Sinai. It's like a triangle.

(TI): Uh huh.

(AW): My- my- uh- squad was literally at the very most southernmost tip of that. Uh- of the peninsula, sitting at a checkpoint. We would spend- I want to say we did like three weeks on the checkpoint and three weeks back in the rear- um-

(TI): Interesting. Not many people know about that- that mission as a whole. What was the whole mission- you said peacekeeping, but what was the- what were you guys trying to do?

(AW): So, that- the Multinational Force and Observers was similar to a UN Peacekeeping Force, but it wasn't under the UN auspices.

(TI): No.

(AW): It was set up as part of the Camp David Accords between Jimmy Carter and- uh- Begin and the Egyptian- I think it was Begin and I can't remember the other fella.

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): Between- basically, to set up a buffer zone between Egypt and Israel after the- after the wars in the 70s. Um, so- we- there was a US Infantry Battalion, Columbian Battalion, and a Fijian Battalion. Uh, so three infantry-

(TI): Like Fiji?

(AW): From Fiji.

(TI): Oh, wow. [Laughter]

(AW): And so, apparently the Fijians- that's how they paid for their military. They have like-

(TI): Interesting.

(AW): Whatever they have, like four battalions in their military and three of them were on peacekeeping duties.

(TI): Oh, wow.

(AW): That's how they basically afford to have a military.

(TI): Oh, wow.

(AW): At least at that time. So, those three units plus several others- Canadians, English, Italians- uh- Danish- I mean- I wanna say it was eleven or more countries that sent people-

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): -to this peacekeeping force and basically, we were in a zone running right along the Egypt-Egypt- Egyptian border but you know, on the Egypt side- in the Sinai Desert on the border of Israel. Then, of course, we were in the South Zone, so we were just on the border of the Gulf of [inaudible].

(TI): Interesting. I- I don't think many people know about that- that whole mission.

(AW): It's been there for a while. It's still there. It's still running there as far as I know and- but thankfully, compared to like other peacekeeping forces, I think there's been a few things that have gone wrong, but for the most part, it's been a fairly- um- uh-

(TI): Peaceful tour

(AW): Yeah, peaceful tour.

(TI): Yeah, so after that, you- you went into Special Forces, correct?

(AW): Right. After- so- we came back, I spent the next two years in the 82nd. Um and then, I was getting out to go to college and joined the 11th Special Forces Group, which really was a reserve group, that was kind of state- the companies were basically up and down the East Coast.

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): As far as north as Fort Devons and as far south as Fort Tampa, I think was the southernmost company. I was in a company in Virginia, um- and joined their with the- basically I wanted to be in that unit partly because of my father's experiences with Special Forces. He was in the Special Forces in Vietnam and was still in at the time when I joined, he was the Group Sergeant Major.

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): So, I- uh-

(TI): Is this- is this Delta or Rangers or-

(AW): No, it's- this is kind of- this is the- what people normally people call the Green Berets.

(TI): Okay, got you, got you.

(AW): So, um, I had done Rangers School, but I was never in the Rangers Battalion. I did that while I was on active duty.

(TL): Okay.

(AW): This was- uh- you know- this was-

(TI): Green Berets

(AW): -that kind of unit.

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): And so, I joined them and they had a lot of weapons guys and they had a lot of commo- I mean- a lot of engineers. They needed communications and medics and I didn't want to carry a heavy radio.
[Laughter]

(TI): [Laughter]

(AW): So, I said- well, I'll be a medic. And- uh- not realizing that the aid bag that the medic carries is a bigger and as heavy as a radio, but- anyway.

(TI): [Laughter] They don't tell you that part.

(AW): I didn't learn that until later. I spent a year- uh- while I was in my first year of college- spent a year just kind of in the training- you know, pre-training program. Yeah and then went back on active duty after my first year of college for- to do- uh- assessment and selection course and then, uh- the SFQC- Special Forces Qualification Course.

(TI): Uh huh.

(AW): Because I was a medic, that course- which, for most people is six months long, took me about a year and a half, because of an extra- you know, almost nine months down at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio learning the medics stuff.

(TI): Got you. So, man, that just sounds- so, you got out- so, did you get out to go to school and this was still as a reserve-

(AW): Right.

(TI): -doing all this.

(AW): So, I basically got out. I was in college at the University of Virginia- um- and- doing my reserve duty as part of the training team and then, I basically took a leave of absence from college to go back on active duty for training for a year and a half. Um-

(TI): Okay

(AW): -and then graduated the Q course in December of 1990 and came back to college that spring for that spring semester in January, which - as people may recall- when we- when the whole Gulf Storm War-

(TI): Yeah...Yeah.

(AW): -the Gulf Storm War-

(TI): Desert Storm One?

(AW): Desert Storm One- yup. So-

(TI): There's a lot of back and forth there.

(AW): Yeah.

(TI): You know- [laughter]- it's like, hey, "I'm active, then I'm not". It's just-

(AW): It gets- definitely, I have- uh- currently- I have four DD-214s.

(TI): [Laughter] Oh, wow.

(AW): So, that's what you get when you get come off of active duty.

(TI): Now, your last time coming off active duty was 2004, correct?

(AW): Correct, 2004. Mhm.

(TI): Okay, how does one become- because you became a medic, you were Special Forces-

(AW): Right.

(TI): -and the Reserve Unit. So, how did that transition come from medic to medical doctor in the army.

(AW): Okay, so, um- as part of my medic training, we did- uh- right at the end of the- the course at Fort Sam Houston, we spent a month doing clinical work in a hospital and I remember pretty distinctly- we were- I was in a small Indian hospital. Indian Public Health Service Hospital in Oklahoma.

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): And- I- was up all night one night kind of observing and assisting with a couple of labor and deliveries, which were pretty cool.

(TI): Hm.

(AW): And then the next morning- uh- as I was kind of getting ready to take a nap- um- they called from the operating rooms and said, "We could use an extra pair of hands in here". So, I scrubbed into a case in the operating room and it was just- the whole time- I went for a run because I was too fired up to take that nap-

(TI): [Laughter]

(AW): -and I was just running and I was like, "This is pretty cool. This whole medical stuff, you know, I liked learning medicine. I liked taking care of patients- um- and it was just- I just realized right then that was what I wanted to do. So, when I got out- when I finished training and I got back to college, I started taking the premed courses- you know, the usual science courses and- and things-

(TI): Uh huh.

(AW): -and took my MCAT. Now, I was a year behind- um- so most people take their MCATs at their- at least at the time- took them at the- uh- spring of their third year of college- you know, their junior and then, applied for medical school their senior year of college.

(TI): Okay.

(AW): I took them at the end of my senior year of college or my fourth year of college and so I had a gap year, I guess after college while I was applying for medical school. Um, still in the Reserves and doing some other stuff, but- and- and, basically, my options were medical school- pay for it- medical school and let the army- you know, the military- apply for the Health Professional Science Scholarship- which- uh- pays- pays for medical school or go to USUs, which is the military medical school up in Bethesda.

(TI): Okay.

(AW): Um- I got in there, but I also got in to the University of Virginia and for various reasons, I- I stayed at UVA on the army scholarship.

(TI): Got you. So, you took the second option.

(AW): Right, so I went- you know, on the Army Scholarship, so they paid my way through college, through med school- um- and- paid for books and for a living stipend and then, I did a couple of rotations during medical school. Um- got my- did the abbreviated Officer Basic Course that they have- um- and basically, when I finished medical school- uh- I applied for and got an internship in General Surgery at Tripler in Hawaii. So, now, this is my third time going on active duty.

(TI): Yeah, yeah.

(AW): Got out to Hawaii and, so- at the time- now, the- the military is different. They're more in line with the civilian residency, where- basically- you match and you are- you go all the way through.

(TI): Right.

(AW): At the time, the Army and the Navy- I don't know if the Air Force was still doing it- but the Army and the Navy were still- for a lot of their specialties, especially their surgical specialties, you would do your intern year and then you would go out and be a General Medical Officer- a GMO. Uh- and then come back and do your residency.

(TI): Hm.

(AW): And- so I- um- we had more interns than we had second year slots- so, I- as part of my application, I said, "Well, if I don't get the spot, I'd like to have a deferment to go out and do a civilian residency." Um- and so, I got that- um- which was not real common. They sent most people out to do GMOs. I was -if I recall, at least from General Surgery, I was one of three General Surgery applicants that year in the Army that got a deferment. Um- and- you know, now I'm scrambling to find a residency and, thankfully, the- the folks at University of Virginia had a relationship with me from medical school and they took me back, so I got back out and now that's my third 214. And- um- spent the next five years at the University of Virginia doing my residency.

(TI): Got you. So, then, you came back on active duty in 2004.

(AW): Right.

(TI): After those five years- got a couple of deployments while you were in-

(AW): Yup, so, came back on- was- uh- they said, "Where do you want to go?" and, of course, knowing- uh- I- um- met my wife during my residency. She was doing a plastics residency at UVA-

(TI): Oh, wow.

(AW): Um- so, we were graduating and she was about six months pregnant or she was- so, when they were asking me where do you want to go- we had just found out we were pregnant. Um-

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): And so I said- you know- if I don't have to move real far, that would be ideal, you know. So, we ended up- thankfully, very nice- moving from Charlottesville to New Port News, Virginia- about two hours down the road.

(TI): Not too far away.

(AW): Right. To Fort Eustace and so, I spent the next couple at years at Fort Eustace. Um- and- during that time-

(TI): So, you-

(AW): - I got two deployments.

(TI): Got you. So, you went through a couple of deployments after- after you originally came back in. I heard that you got to swim in one of Saddam's pools in the Green Zone.

(AW): Swam in two of them, I guess.

(TI): Two of them- talk to me about that. Talk to me about that.

(AW): So-

(TI): What's that like, because I was out in the [inaudible] Province. I was out West.

(AW): Yeah, you were. You weren't doing any swimming. [Laughter]

(TI): [Laughter] No, no- no swimming whatsoever.

(AW): So, in the Green Zone, we were- I was- both times I went- the second time I went in the winter, so I didn't do much swimming the second time around. But the first time I was there March through October- the heat of the summer as you know and the Green Zone- we were in the hospital known as [inaudible] which was on *Baghdad ER* and some other documentaries. But we were- um- um- I don't know, about five hundred meters down the road from the main palace- Saddam's main palace.

(TI): Wow.

(AW): And that palace had- they had soldiers there. They had State Department at the time. This was before the Embassy was built. This was 2005. Um- the State Department- you know, lots of contractors-

(TI): Different agencies.

(AW): All the different agencies.

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): At the time, that was actually the closest gym and- um- dining facility for us.

(TI): Oh, wow.

(AW): Um- so we would make that walk up there- you know- two or three times a day.

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): There was another dining facility a little closer, but it was kind of not as good-

(TI): It wasn't in a palace. [Laughter]

(AW): It wasn't the palace- I mean, it was nice. We went up there and we were in the main throne room or whatever it was. I don't know what room it was in Sadaam's time.

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): We were in this big, huge ballroom that they had the dining facility set up in. Um- they later moved it into a separate building- but- um- at the time, it was right in the middle of the palace. It was pretty cool.

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): And out back- there was this big swimming pool. You know, first week we're there, they're like, "Hey, we're going swimming." And I'm like, "Really, I thought we were in-

(TI): [Laughter]

(AW): - a combat zone here."

(TI): It's the Green Zone, man. [Laughter]

(AW): It's the Green Zone. We still had to- had to wear our flag jackets and our helmets and our everything and take our weapons and take them down. We'd set them down on the side of the pool and go swimming. You know, it was pretty nice. Now, we were obviously, as soldiers, not supposed to be drinking there- um, but they had a bar, because the State Department people would drink at it. So, I mean, it was-

(TI): Wow.

(AW): So, that was the one pool. The later [inaudible] opened up a pool that was a little closer on the other side of us that supposedly was one of his son's pools. I can't remember which one.

(TI): Who can say [inaudible]

(AW): So, that one was- uh- a little less crowded. They had a gym there and a pool. We'd go down to that one, because it was a little less crowded than the palace one.

(TI): Interesting. In [inaudible] all we had- I think- there was a stadium that had [inaudible] movies. That was the only source of entertainment that we had.

(AW): Yeah.

(TI): Um- [laughter] so, were you there when we captured Saddam?

(AW): I was there just- I got there right after he had been captured.

(TI): Okay.

(AW): I was there-

(TI): Okay.

(AW): - I- uh- missed him a couple of times. I got there- I don't remember the exact timing. He got captured right at the end of 2004 or 200-

(TI): Mmhm.

(AW): He was in- he was in custody when I was there.

(TI): Okay.

(AW): They had him out at the- out at the airfield- I actually don't remember where they had him, but they had him in the prison that they had him in. Um, not [inaudible] but the-

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): - the one they replaced with.

(TI): Got you.

(AW): And, so, yeah- I missed that. I got there- I don't know if you remember the- when I got to the hospital for the first time, they were still- they were just talking about- because they had just had the- um- was it the Italian? The Italian reporter who they had kind of rescued and when they were trying to drive back through the checkpoint, they got shot up.

(TI): Oh, wow, no.

(AW): I don't know if you remember it, yeah- it was big in the news at the time- but-

(TI): Got you.

(AW): -he had just come through the hospital. I missed that by a few days.

(TI): Oh, wow. So, did you get a chance to examine Saddam or do you know anyone who did?

(AW): Um- I do- uh-

(TI): Okay.

(AW): I don't want to speak too much to it, because I don't know if it was ever released for public consumption. Uh-

(TI): Got you.

(AW): I- I did- I will say this. I almost did a procedure on Saddam. They were out of the prison and of course, when these- when we had the prisoners- this included everybody, not just the high value guys. Uh-

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): We really provided- uh- complete medical care. It was very, very regimented how much we give them, which- they got better care than some of our own people did- it seemed.

(TI): Sure, sure.

(AW): Um- but- we had a gentleman- he was in the deck of cards, but I don't know who he was-

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): -who had had some- um- had some bleeding with his bowel movements and I don't know if this is good for consumption on your podcast, but- um- he had some bleeding and they brought him to me to do a colonoscopy.

(TI): Got you.

(AW): So, I did a colonoscopy. No problems, but then they had talked to me about- could I- I guess- something similar had happened to Saddam and they had asked me if I could do a scope on him and of course, they were very careful to name names or anything-

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): -but the guy was kind of winking the whole time.

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): So, I was set up to do it, but I guess he decided he was like, you guys are going to execute me and I don't care if I found out I have colon cancer.

(TI): [Laughter] He's like "whatever".

(AW): Right, because- I mean- they- they had to do the full consent and everything and he just said "No, I don't want it done."

(TI): Got you.

(AW): He did come back to our hospital a little late after I had left to go north. He came back in and he had- it was during his trial and I think he was doing something- you know, some fasting and he was on like a food strike or hunger strike or whatever he was doing.

(TI): Got you. Yeah, yeah.

(AW): They brought him in to give him some IV fluids, so there were some people that I was there with-

(TI): Got you.

(AW): -you know, took care of giving him some fluids.

(TI): Got you. You came back after your deployments.

(AW): Mhm.

(TI): Left active duty in 2008.

(AW): Right.

(TI): How much total time in did you have at that point- between in and out of the military?

(AW): Okay, so, um- so, I came back from my last deployment, went back to Fort Bragg for a year and then got out in 2008. So, when I got to the VA, I bought back my active duty time and I want to say- I don't know the exact calculation- it was just under ten years of active duty time that I bought back.

(TI): Got you.

(AW): And then, with the reserve time, I've got somewhere- again, I have to calculate it out- I got about fifteen- somewhere between fifteen and sixteen years of-

(TI): Wow.

(AW): -of good years, you know, for a reserve-

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): -time.

(TI): Got you.

(AW): But I got out completely. I didn't go on the reserves and the real reason I got out was- um- you know, by this time- 2008- I have two daughters, three and one, and I'm a commander of a surgical team that's due to go to Afghanistan for a year. Um- and as the commander, I'd get the whole tour-

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): -you know. It was just- it was- it was hard. My wife wasn't from a military family. She wasn't- you know- she- uh-

(TI): She's over it.

(AW): She- yeah- she's like, "We've done it."

(TI): [Laughter]

(AW): You know, I've done two deployments. I mean- I came home from the first deployment- um-

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): And then ten months before I deployed again, we had our second daughter and then, I left like two weeks after she was born. Um-

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): Thank the lord for my- you know- my mother in law and family and everybody helping, but- you know- she was ready to kind of settled down and the girls were getting to that age where I was the commander of this forward surgical team, so we'd go to the field once a month and-

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): -the girls really noticed they were at the point noticing when I wasn't there and so,

(TI): Yeah. Um- my wife's an Army brat like you, you know, her dad's a- was in the Army for thirty years and even she- at my ten year, twelve year mark- was like, "Okay, I'm over it."

(AW): Yeah.

(TI): We're done. We're done. [Laughter]

(AW): That's enough. We've put in our time.

(TI): Hats off to the families that can do the twenties, do the thirties-

(AW): I know. Well, especially in the- in the- in the last-

(TI): That time-

(AW): Twenty- yeah- certainly, in that time- I guess the operational tempo slowed down some, but- but-

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): Yeah, it- if you were in between 2001 and 2012, 2013- in that time frame- I mean- and you're still in- you're right-

(TI): Hats off.

(AW): Absolutely. I salute you.

(TI): So, um, for those that are in transitioning out today.

(AW): Mmhm.

(TI): Can you give- I don't know- like- like- one veteran life hack that you've learned since becoming a civilian-

(AW): [Laughter]

(TI): -to navigate civilian world.

(AW): One- oh, man. Um- you know, it's probably a little different coming out as a physician and going straight into having- going straight into a job. Um-

(TI): Sure.

(AW): A lot of guys are getting out that are either looking for jobs or going to school. Um- I would say- I mean-

(TI): But-

(AW): - the one that I would say-

(TI): But- but you've gone in and out of many times. Yeah, yeah. You've always figured out a way to eventually advance your life and advance your career.

(AW): Right.

(TI): You know, if at any of those times-

(AW): Probably biggest thing I would say I wish I had done the first time I got out back in '88-

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): I wish I had- and I think as people are getting out now- we're more aware of it, but I think I did not take advantage of all the things- all the benefits that I had. Um- you know- I didn't sign up with the VA. I didn't know the medical stuff. I didn't- I just didn't know and it was different then. They didn't push it as much as they do now. But I mean, use those benefits because they're there and- you know- whether it's getting- you know- a VA loan for a house or your educational benefits. I mean, I did that- that's why I went in the Army. Use the College Fund and the GI Bill.

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): I mean, there's a ton of money out there- use it. I mean, use it wisely- but don't abuse it. But- uh- definitely use your benefits because they're out there and there are a lot more benefits private companies do and things like websites that can get you discounts and stuff that we didn't have then. You know-

(TI): Got you.

(AW): I think it's good.

(TI): Got you. So, uh, before we move on to your medical career-

(AW): Uh huh.

(TI): What is one thing- if you had to look back at your entire military service- military career- can you give me either one best friend or one mentor that you had while you were in?

(AW): Hm. Um- well, I would say each stage of my career had someone a little different. Um- you know, when I was enlisted in the 82nd- uh- you know, my platoon- I had a guy by the name of Jay [not sure how to spell his name] who went off to Officer Candidate School. Uh, Scott [not sure how to spell his last name] was my Platoon Sergeant when I got out. Just- you know, great leaders- um- John Moore was our commanding officer in my company who- you know- really took an interest in his soldiers and kind of taught me. Not only made me able to do the things I wanted to do, but also to give me an example when I became an Officer later of what an Officer should be like. Um, I think- you know, my whole- you know- my whole A Team. You get real close to an A Team in Special Forces.

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): Those guys- Roger Hale, Mark Bowman, a bunch of- a bunch of guys that just- you know- I'm still friends with it twenty-five years later.

(TI): Still keep in touch in them?

(AW): Yeah, we still keep in touch.

(TI): Oh, okay.

(AW): So-

(TI): That's great.

(AW): Those guys- and then-

(TI): So, they must live pretty close still.

(AW): Well, they're- the majority of them are in- I mean, most of them are in-

(TI): Virginia?

(AW): Yeah, we're all in Virginia.

(TI): Because of the Reserve Unit and all.

(AW) Reserve Unit- um-

(TI): Yup, yup.

(AW): I think Lee lives in- in Richmond and the others all lived in- well, Marks kind of bounced around now, but the others lived down in Virginia Beach Area. You know, so, we had a reunion every couple of years with the whole company and so, we tried to get together, you know, so.

(TI): That's good- good.

(AW): I had a couple of them passed away-

(TI): Got you.

(AW): But overall, just a great group of guys. I mean, that was a time- that was in the late 80s and the Reserve Unit in the early 90s. We had guys in that unit- um- well, Lee was- you know- guys that had served in Vietnam still. So-

(TI): Wow.

(AW): So, a lot of experience- uh- there and- uh-

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): Really, I had a- you know- again, I don't know if it's mental, but people like- uh- uh- you know, that when after doing my medical side- as a doctor- um-

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): Just the people I served with- Marty Harnish- was a great friend- is a great friend. Uh- he's a Sergeant down in- I think he's still down in San Antonio. Um- you know- Aaron Edgar was my Commander of the 28th [unsure what was said]. So, just good people- um-

(TI): Do you tell jokes as doctors? Is there- is the humor like *M*A*S*H* pretty dark? Like- uh- is there any truth to that? What's it like being a deployed like- you guys had to have developed a pretty close bond-

(AW): Yeah.

(TI): -as a surgeon in a room together with surgeons.

(AW): It's not quite as- well, I mean- you know- it's not quite as risqué, I guess, as *M*A*S*H* was, I guess, in terms of the jokes and the hijinks they got up to. Um and certainly not as- if you saw the movie- the original movie, not the TV show.

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): But there were definitely days where I felt, in Baghdad, that- in there- we had- we had two operating rooms and both rooms had two beds in it, which is unusual. I mean, if you're in the United States, you only have one-

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): - one OR bed in OR room. Well, we had two big, kind of double sized rooms and both rooms had a bed- two beds in it. So, it was not uncommon to be doing two cases, you know, next to each other.

(TI): Interesting, interesting.

(AW): Um- and then I remember, you know, you know- you're kind of talking across to the room on the other side. Uh, there's no laugh track or anything, but I think any surgical operating room, there are very intense moments, but there are some light moments as well. Um-

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): And I remember we were over there and we probably- someone sent the DVD of- something of the original *M*A*S*H* movie and I go back and we went and watched that. And I go back and watch that and watch the TV show occasionally and, you know, those- I mean- there's again hijinks outside in the radar-

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): -and all those guys. But the operating room scenes- you know- because they have three or four beds in a tent and they're all kind of working on different patients. Those-

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): I mean- I don't know how realistic they were to the Korean War, but they were pretty realistic. I mean- they were- I thought they were fairly-

(TI): Accurate.

(AW): I thought they were fairly accurate in terms of the medicine and it kind of reminded me of a lot of- you know- at times where everything is real busy and quiet and you're working and times when you're kind of joking back and forth between different tables and so-

(TI): Interesting.

(AW): So, it was a little bit like that. Um- you know- I wasn't able to steal the Jeep and drive off-

(TI): [Laughter]

(AW): -into the sunset.

(TI): Yeah, none of the Hollywood part, but yeah.

(AW): Yeah, we weren't- we weren't- you know- we didn't have a still in our building.

(TI): Yeah, yeah.

(AW): But-

(TI): As nice as it could have been.

(AW): Yeah. [Laughter]

(TI): There was probably one in there in the State Department.

(AW): I'm sure the State Department [inaudible]

(TI): [Laughter] So, um, how did you find your way to the VA and Salem Medical Center?

(AW): Yeah, so- um- interestingly enough, so the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, which is about two hours from here-

(TI): Man, they took care of you.

(AW): Yeah, well-

(TI): [Laughter]

(AW): Well, there's nothing wrong with the University of Virginia. I'll-

(TI): Absolutely not.

(AW): I'll talk about them all day long.

(TI): Yeah, absolutely. I mean- my wife did go to Virginia Tech, which is sad, but-

(AW): There you go-okay, well-

(TI): [Laughter]

(AW): That's alright. We got plenty of those folks here too.

(TI): We won't- we won't hold it against her.

(AW): No- um- no, the- the medical school at the University of Virginia- they- we've- they've had a- for a long time, a- this is kind of one of their- like a lot of VAs which have teaching associations with medical schools and- and university hospitals.

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): Salem has a long- um- history with the University of Virginia as their teaching VA hospital- um- and now we also have with- uh- the- a couple

of newer medical schools. BCom, down in Blacksburg, and Virginia Tech's medical school here in Roanoke, but-

(TI): Mhm.

(AW): They- they weren't around then.

(TI): [Laughter]

(AW): And so, when I was a medical student, my first rotation as my- not my first, first- but my first major block as a medical- as a third year medical student- was surgery and I spent six weeks right here in the Salem VA.

(TI): Wow.

(AW): Three attendings here and some residents. The residents from UVA came down here and still do. Um- so that was my first introduction to Salem and- uh- then, when I came back to UVA to do my residency, I came down here for several months. Um- at the beginning and at the end of my residency. So, we have residents in their first and second year here.

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): And then we have- uh- two residents who will spend two to three months down here. So, I was down here for six months during my first two years. Six months out of the first twelve- twenty-four months of my residency at UVA and three months as a Chief. As a fifth-year senior resident, um- so-

(TI): So, you spent a lot of time at Salem-

(AW): I spent a lot of time down here at Salem.

(TI): [Laughter]

(AW): Yeah. So, you know, I- I really loved the place. My attendings were great. Um- they- you know- Wayne Wilson was the Chief of Surgery at the time. He has since retired, but he- uh- he had been here since the 70s. So, I mean, when he retired finally a few years ago, he put forty plus years here at Salem.

(TI): Wow.

(AW): It was a very stable program.

(TI): Yeah. Sounds like it.

(AW): Great guys to work with it. Uh- I loved- you know, there's frustrations that are true of any- as I found out later- are true in any hospital you go to.

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): You know, but Salem is a great- has a great reputation and has a great- I don't know- attitude. Salem has a very strong culture and- um- and so- when I was looking- when I was getting out of the Army in 2008- I- um- I was looking- we were hoping to come back to Virginia- the state.

(TI): I mean, you guys have spent your entire career there.

(AW): Right.

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): And- um- and so, we were- um- we were interviewing- I interviewed up at the University of Virginia to go back there. We were looking at some places in the Valley. Um- we were- my wife had an interview at a plastic surgery group in Lynchburg. You know, so were looking in the state.

(TI): And this was 2008, right?

(AW): This is early 2008- mmhm.

(TI): Got you. Did the recession affect- does the recession affect- like- doctors' employment? We always hear that there's not enough doctors.

(AW): Yeah-

(TI): Was it more interviewing to find the right fit?

(AW): It's just finding the right fit, I think. I mean- I think- you know- I got offered the job at UVA, but there wasn't really anything in Charlottesville that was gonna work for my wife at the time.

(TI): Got you.

(AW): Um- she got offered the job in Lichenberg and I had- I had an interview set up with a group in Lichenberg. Um- you know- I'm- I don't know if they would have offered me or not- but if they had, you know, we certainly might have ended up at Lichneberg. I don't think the recession in 2008 affected us as much as it unfortunately affected other folks.

(TI): Just a lot of other industries.

(AW): At least my experience with it, I can't speak for everybody and all locations. But when I was looking for a job, it did not seem like it was going to be very difficult to find a job.

(TI): Got you.

(AW): Um and so, anyway, I was at a Virginia Surgical meeting- you know, the Virginia Surgical Group, and ran into my old- uh- attendings here- Dr. Wade Wilson and Dr. George Riverra- um- and they basically said, "You know, we had another guy that just left and we have an opening. Are you- would you be interested?" I said, "Sure, I'd love to come back to Salem." And-

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): Um- and so-

(TI): Almost like coming home.

(AW): Pretty much, pretty much. And so, basically, you know- they contacted our Chief of Surgery now and he- we set up an interview and I came up and interviewed. My wife came up and interviewed with him. Uh- for a part time spot, which was what she was looking for and- you know- it worked out perfectly. So, after I got out, I came on board here. I spent about two weeks by myself- you know- in one of those little business- you know- suite hotels- whatever you call them.

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): And- uh- um- and- you know- while we got the moving stuff and everything moved out of Fort Bragg and then, my folks- my family joined up here.

(TI): Got you. So, what is your role currently at the Salem Medical Center?

(AW): So, I'm currently staff General Surgeon. I'm- you know- I'm not in any official leadership capacity.

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): Um- I do mostly general surgery- uh- belly surgery- surgery on the abdomen. Hernias are probably my most common surgery- gallbladders- uh- I do some thoracic surgery. I do- I did- for a little while, I did some vascular stuff, but we've hired a vascular surgeon, so I've kind of let him do that. Teaching of residents and medical students and all the full gambit of committees. Uh- I do disciplinary appeal boards, so that's for the VA. That's how I've gotten to travel and see some other VAs and see what they're like.

(TI): Got you.

(AW): Yeah.

(TI): Got you. So, um, Dr. Weed-

(AW): Yes.

(TI): What's one thing you learned in service that you apply to what you do today?

(AW): I mean, other than the medical stuff, um-

(TI): Yeah, other than what they taught you. [Laughter] I kinda had to think too when- when the previous host of the show asked me that question. You know, I was like, "Well, I was a combat videographer in the Marine Corps, so it kind of logically-

(AW): - you keep doing that. [Laughter]

(TI): [Laughter]

(AW): Yeah, no, I- I think, probably, the thing I learned- the thing that drew me back there- besides the people-

(TI): Give me one second, Doctor- give me one second. Okay, you're going to laugh at this, but part of the running joke of this podcast is that I run it out of my mother in law's basement. [Laughter] And- um- I'm- we're living in our in-law's place until our house is built and she just called on me to ask me if the meat tasted good for tonight's dinner. [Laughter]

(AW): [Laughter] Perfect, perfect.

(TI): What was one thing- one thing you learned from service that you apply today?

(AW): Um- I think- you know- one of the things that drew me back here- to come back to Salem- other than the people here- my attendings, you know, that I worked with as a resident and medical student. But just- I think one of the things- I used to do recruiting and I still do some recruiting things and one of the things that I always thought about was- you know- why should I provide great medical care to our servicemen and our veterans. My thought was that there are a lot of people who need great medical care- um- throughout this country- a lot of people need it. In my mind, I can't find too many more people who deserve it more than-

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): -our servicemen and women and our veterans. So, that's- that was a big draw to come back to the VA- um- after my service to- to just continue to serve and provide the best medical care I can. Um- not to inflate my own abilities- but just to provide the best care that I can-

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): -to a lot of people who really- um- wouldn't get it otherwise. But I think they deserve it as much as anyone else I can think of- um- and so, I try to remember that every day- you know, especially when-

(TI): Got you.

(AW): -things are getting a little frustrating. Uh- or- you know- the bureaucracy is kind of weighing down more than I'd like it to be. Um- that- it's- I'm not really here because it's a great job. It is, but-

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): I'm not really here because it's a great lifestyle- it is. I'm really here because of the people on the other side of the- on the other side of the table or on the table or-

(TI): I can- I can only imagine that there's other like- you know- avenues in your- in your industry that you could have taken that have led you to- that could have led you to-

(AW): Maybe, maybe. I mean-

(TI): -lucrative-

(AW): I mean, yeah, probably. I could probably make more money if I went out and- but honestly, you know, it's definitely not-

(TI): That's not everything.

(AW): You know, I love- you know, it's a great situation here- um- in terms of both my family and my work environment and I- you know-

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): When I meet some of these Veterans from, especially the older guy- we don't see too many more anymore. You know, the World War II guys or the- you know- now, it's mostly Vietnam-

(TI): Mhm.

(AW): -Veterans at this point. But yeah-

(TI): Korea.

(AW): Oh, yeah, just asking them their stories and reminding myself- you know- we all did that at one time. It's kind of fun.

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): And then if I ever rarely run into someone who's in an old unit of mine, like the 82nd or something like that, it's always fun.

(TI): Of course, of course. So, uh, Dr. Weed- what is one nonprofit or a Veteran in the Veteran community that you see as a- I don't know- as a shining example for others to emulate?

(AW): You know, I've donated money for several years to Wounded Warriors Program and I know they've had some question marks to some- some leadership issues years ago, but I still think the work they do-

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): - is- um- is- is- is important work. Um- I haven't been as much involved with the more traditional- you know- VFW or the American Legion.

(TI): Got you. Um, Dr. Weed, is there anything else- uh- your career- about the VA or anything else that we've covered that I haven't asked which you think is important to share to the listeners?

(AW): No, I think- uh- other than just- you know- as people who go to work every day and see those Veterans, just remember why they're coming to work and- it- it frustrates me a little bit when we see and- and it's just the nature of the beast when you see reports of- of problems at various VAs and- and my- you know.

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): I know there's no perfect hospital. I guarantee that of all of those things people read about- um- and then you- you- people say the VA is horrible, because of whatever is going on and those problems are at- those are the same problems every hospital has. I mean- I promise you that you can go to Johns Hopkins and find a problem and you can- you know-

(TI): [Laughter]

(AW): There's just no perfect hospital.

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): It's an imperfect- it's an imperfect industry. Um- and-

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): Everybody's trying to make it better and unfortunately, you know, the Johns Hopkins- when something goes bad on there- maybe the people in Baltimore read about it in their paper or we hear about it in the medical community. But nobody in Arizona reads about it.

(TI): [inaudible]

(AW): Nobody's paying attention to it, but when one VA-

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): -has a major problem and I'm not saying we shouldn't pay attention to these problems. But when one VA has a major problem, we all get painted. It's- it's frustrating- I just want-

(TI): Yeah.

(AW): If anybody's frustrated with their VA, I certainly appreciate that frustration- um- but I also- it's- it's hard- I take it almost personally when people start badmouthing the VA based on one report from some place. We don't hear the good stories. You know, the good that the VA does every day.

[00:59:42] PSA:

Man: My grandfather served in World War II. Spending time with him were the best memories of my life. I became a physician at the VA because of my grandfather, so I can help others like him. I can't imagine working with better doctors or a more dedicated staff. I'm fulfilling my life mission with the help of my team and thanks to these Veterans. I'm proud to be a doctor at the VA and proud to honor my grandfather every day. Search VA Careers to find out more.

[01:00:12] Music

[01:00:18] CLOSING MONOLOGUE:

(TI): I want to thank Dr. Weed for his patience- that was recorded a while ago and we all know I only have one slot a week. So, again- thank you,

Dr. Weed, for that interview and thank you for your time. Dr. Weed is currently still at the VA medical facility in Salem, Virginia. This week's Borne the Battle Veteran of the Week is Marine Corps Veteran Harry Bud Carlsen. Harry Carlsen was born in Brookfield, Illinois in January of 1912. In 1941, he moved to California where he worked as an auto mechanic. Upon hearing about the attack on Pearl Harbor, he enlisted in the Marine Corps. Carlsen was a member of Company A, Second Marine Division, Second Amphibian Tractor Battalion and was also the Quartermaster Maintenance Chief. Throughout the war, he participated in numerous amphibious landings. At one point, he even contracted malaria, but continued to battle while ill. Oorah. He fought in the Battle of Tarawa in November of 1943 on the island of Betio, part of the nation of Kiribati. He was fatally shot while trying to take out a Japanese machine gun nest. He was buried on the island and supposedly and was supposedly returned home after the war. However, identification records were lost and the remains of 550 Marines who were killed in the battle were unidentifiable. His body was transferred to National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii, where his remains were labeled: Unknown X- 82. After many years of testing and advances in DNA technology, Unknown X- 82 was officially identified as the remains of Carlsen. In the summer of 2018, after many years of testing and advances in DNA technology, Unknown X- 82 was officially identified as the remains of Carlsen. In October of 2018, Carlsen's remains were transferred to his family in Arlington Heights, Illinois, where he received a proper funeral service. Carlsen was then buried on October 13th, 2018 at Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery in Elwood, Illinois. Of the eighteen thousand Marines who fought in the [inaudible] Battle of Tarawa, over one thousand died and twenty-one hundred were wounded. Harry Bud Carlsen. We honor his service. 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 or link and let us know why you'd like to see him or her as the Borne the Battle Veteran of the Week. If you liked this episode and haven't subscribed yet, please do. We're on iTunes, Spotify, Stitcher, iHeart Radio, Google Podcasts- pretty much any podcasting app known to cellphone, computer, tablet, or man. As always, for more stories on Veterans and Veterans' benefits, check out our website: blogs.va.gov and follow the VA on social media- Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, RallyPoint, DEPTVetAffairs, US Department of Affairs- no matter the social media, you can always find us with that blue check mark. Thank you again for listening and we'll see right here next week. Thanks again.

[01:03:46] Music

(Text Transcript Ends)