

*Borne the Battle*

Episode # 206

Terrence Hayes, VFW National Director of Communications

<https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/77577/borne-battle-206-army-veteran-terrence-hayes-veterans-foreign-wars/>

(Text Transcript Follows)

[00:00:00] Music

### **[00:00:10] OPENING MONOLOGUE:**

**Tanner Iskra (TI):** Oh, let's get it! Monday, August 3rd, 2020. *Borne the Battle*. Brought to you by the Department of Veterans Affairs. The podcast that focuses on inspiring veteran's stories and puts a highlight on important resources, offices, and benefits for our veterans. I am your host, Marine Corps veteran Tanner Iskra. Hope everyone had a great week outside of podcast land. If you're not a follower of us on Instagram, we have also started to promote *Borne the Battle* and our other podcasts within the VA podcast network on VA's Instagram stories. So, if you follow [@deptvetaffairs](#) you'll find them and other stories from Vantage Point in the stories and in the feed. For the podcast, you'll get a link directly to the episode via either Apple Podcasts or Spotify, whichever is convenient for you.

Received a couple of ratings and no reviews, remember the reviews and subs go a long way to shooting the podcast up in the algorithms, which allows more veterans to potentially discover the information provided in both the guest interviews and in the VA news releases. I want to try a little test with you. Go ahead and unsubscribe and then, but remember to just resubscribe real quick, I want to see what that does to the algorithms, if there's actually any, any change. It's a little rumor I heard; it just would be very interesting to know.

Before we get to news releases, I wanted to give you guys a heads up on a couple of blogs on [blogs.va.gov](https://www.blogs.va.gov) [Link: <https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/>] that are receiving an unprecedented amount of attention. As a matter of fact, they're actually shutting down our website or the entire blog, at certain

peak hours. So, I would advise if you're going to look at these blogs, look at them in off hours. There's two blogs right now, they're done by a colleague of mine, Adam Stump and they are Veteran Benefits 2020. They're state benefits, not big VA, not federal VA, but these are state VA benefits. And there were a couple of blogs, one the most popular benefit in your state and the most underused benefit in your state. Again, these are state benefits that are particular to your state, and he provides a list that go in alphabetical order, and you can look for your state and see what some of these are and where you can go and look for where there's additional resources, and benefits for veterans in your state. So, couple of popular blogs on [blogs.va.gov](https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/) [Link: <https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/>]. I think one's almost at, you know, 600,000 - 700,000 views, something crazy. Check them out if you already haven't, definitely some good info in those blogs.

As for this week in the news release world, we've only got one. It says for immediate release, VA and partner agencies announced COVID insights partnership. The US Department of Veterans Affairs, along with the Departments of Energy and Health and Human Services, recently announced the formation of the COVID-19 insights partnership which is an initiative to coordinate and share health data, as well as research and expertise to aid in the fight against COVID-19. The COVID-19 insights partnership creates a framework for VA and HHS to use the Department of Energy's world leading, high performance computing and artificial intelligence resources to conduct COVID-19 research and analyze health data that would otherwise not be possible. Research and analysis conducted by the COVID-19 insights partnership will focus on vaccine and therapeutic development and outcomes, virology, and other critical scientific topics to understand COVID-19 better. HHS and VA will provide additional updates and information on research projects as they become available. Summit, the United States fastest supercomputer, located at the Department of Energy's Oak Ridge National Laboratory is accelerating COVID-19 research by running large-scale complex analysis on a vast amount of health data. Summit will analyze massive integrated data sets and the insights will help researchers identify and advanced potential treatments and enhance outcomes for COVID-19 patients.

For contacts to contact people for more information on this, for the Department of Veterans Affairs will be our Press Secretary, Christina Noel. It's [Christina.Noel@va.gov](mailto:Christina.Noel@va.gov). For the Department of Energy, it'll be Shaylyn Hynes. That's [shaylyn.hynes@hq.doe.gov](mailto:shaylyn.hynes@hq.doe.gov). Shaylyn is spelled S H A Y L Y N. Hynes is spelled H Y N E S. And the department of health and human services, their contact is [media@hhs.gov](mailto:media@hhs.gov).

A quick Google search also showed me that Summit is a supercomputer that was built by IBM and is way more powerful than their Watson, the one on Jeopardy and everything. Definitely some interesting stuff.

All right, this week's guest is an Army veteran, he worked in public affairs. He was also a former coworker of mine in the media relations department, who left our office to take on the role of being the VFW's National Communications Director. So, after a couple months on the job, I linked up with him to see what is up at his new gig and with the VFW in general. He is army veteran, Terrence Hayes. Enjoy.

[00:05:29] Music

### **[00:05:34] Interview:**

(TI): How you been, man? How's it going? How's the new gig?

Terrence Hayes (TH): New gig at the VFW man. It's been great. It's given me an opportunity to truly advocate on the front lines for our veteran service members and military families. I've been able to be a part of some very instrumental legislation that has passed that has affected some key stakeholders within the veteran community. And you can just see how the impact of that has on those individuals. So, it's been a blessing, man, to go from the department of veterans where I learned so much and to be able to take what I learned from the department and actually apply it with the VFW, has been a godsend for the organization.

(TI): I think that's really when you look at the effect between a regular nonprofit and a VSO is that effect on Capitol Hill that you can have.

(TH): Without question.

(TI): Quick background, Terrence and I, we worked together and quickly bonded over our shared interest in the wrestling industry. You know that I quit watching the product, but I still keep up with the dirt sheets because I'm fascinated by the behind the scenes of that industry for whatever reason. You know what I think, it's because back in the seventies and eighties and nineties, man, wrestlers made the Rockstar lifestyle seemed like a tea party in comparison, you know. But we bonded over that and you were my strategy partner, man, and thinking of ways to get the WWE to recognize a *Borne the Battle*.

(TH): Right.

(TI): And we weren't physically pretty close together in our office. For the VA, I mean, you just mentioned that you used to develop relationships with media and answer media queries, and now you're kind of on the other side of that, you're kind of the one that's asking the questions now, right?

(TH): Well, same thing, it's kind of similar. I would say I'm basically the official spokesperson for the organization, for the national organization.

(TI): Amazing, dude.

(TH): I'm kind of doing the same media type of stuff I was doing with the department, but now just on a different level.

(TI): Okay.

(TH): So, it's been, like I said, it's been a blessing to be able to develop those relationships from the department, carry those relationships over to the VFW, and now it's just different conversations now.

(TI): Absolutely. You were also our emergency response coordinator kind of shine a little bit of a light into that role, because I think the IOC is something that not many veterans know about the VA. Was an information operation center? Right?

(TH): Right. Exactly. Yeah. And it's more vital than ever. Obviously with the COVID-19 pandemic that we're going through right now, I can just imagine how the IOC is operating, even though it's operating probably from a remote location. But that being said, it's a vital resource for the department where, you know, anytime a natural disaster or a medical emergency, or just anything critical to the department occurs, the Information Operations Center basically, opens up and all folks are on deck, you know, from the public affairs staff to the VHA, to the VBA, to the HR folks. And we all work in tandem to ensure that a we're synced up with whatever operations are going on, whatever strategic messaging we're trying to send out to our publics, whether that be to the media, whether that be to our veterans, whether that be to the American public. But it's a great resource to have where all folks join together and are able to basically accomplish a mission and a common goal.

(TI): I think, you know, the VA is much like any other major corporation, big ship, tiny rudder, you know, so any way

(TH): Right.

(TI): that you can knock down those stove pipes, as we call them in those corporations or in those agencies, it's always a good thing.

(TH): Without question.

(TI): Very well. Well, your current role, after the VA, was a great pivot to your career, man. But before we get into all that, one thing that you and I never really talked about was our respective military services. We just kind of bonded in general. Other than the fact that we both knew a workforce art major Kent.

Commented [WN1]: Not sure what he said.

(TH): Right. Exactly.

(TI): But you were in the army. When and where did you decide to join in the first-place brother?

(TH): Yeah, it's a crazy story to be quite honest with you, man. I went to a college preparatory high school down in Jacksonville, Florida where I'm from and where, you know, all my family pretty much lives. And at the time it was the number one academic high school in the country. And so, I had a glide path to go to college, man. I had two band scholarships as a matter of fact, one to Florida A&M University, the other to Bethune-Cookman University and I was going to be there to play the percussion. Because I was in the band for four years.

(TI): You were on the drum line?

(TH): I was man. I was on the drum line and what's crazy is that, like I said, with those scholarship opportunities, my parents just knew I was on the glide path to go to school straight after high school. And one day, I just woke up and said, you know what? I want to do something different, you know, 17-year-old kid, wanted to kind of, you know, break away, move away from home because those two schools were in the state of Florida. So, I was like, you know what, I want to go see something else, I want to be part of something bigger.

(TI): Gotcha.

(TH): And the crazy thing, both of my parents had served in the military, in army as well. But it was prior to my birth. So, I guess you could say we're a military family but one day I just called a recruiter because I had never seen a recruiter, I didn't know what an ASVAB was. Unfortunately, they didn't allow recruiters and stuff on our high school campus. But, yeah.

(TI): Really?

(TH): Yeah. So, I'm like, what's the ASVAB? Is it like the SAT? You know, so, I go ahead and talk to this recruiter and he tells me about all these gigs and everything. And then, I finally informed my parents that the recruiter is coming to the house. And lo and behold, my

mom wasn't too happy, my father was like, "Hey, you gotta do what you gotta do for yourself". And I think at the end of the day, it all worked out. I was able to join immediately after I graduated high school. And then I went to basic training that August and lo and behold, I was ...

Commented [WN2]: Should I put ellipses?

Commented [IT3R2]:

(TI): Now, you didn't join the band, right?

(TH): No, no. The crazy thing is that, you know, I talked to my parents and everything like that and my mom ensured that I basically got the job that suited me best. And I was really good at English and things of that nature. So, I joined public affairs but when I got to my first duty station, Fort Hood, Texas, and I'm in the fourth infantry division, and I meet the fourth infantry division band director, who just happened to go to college and graduate with my high school band director. And so, they always talked and this gentleman somehow found out who I was and that I played, and he tried to get me to change my MOS within like the first two months of me really, you know, joining the army, knowing what my present MOS was.

(TI): Wow.

(TH): And as much as I wanted to play the percussion and everything like that, unfortunately, I turned him down and here we are today in my public affairs career 20 plus years later.

(TI): So, you just want to do something different. You were just like, you know what I'm done with that part of my life, ready to go try a new adventure.

(TH): Yeah, I wanted to travel, man, wanted to meet new people, wanted to be part of an organization that was bigger than myself. And I felt that the military, the army was that organization and it was going to teach me a whole lot of life skills. And my intent was never to serve 20 years. It was to serve five years, return back home, and go back into the corporate workforce. But I loved the people, I loved the mission, I loved everything about the military, and I made it a lifelong career.

(TI): Gotcha. One thing I read in your bio that I did not know about was a bronze star. Was that in country?

(TH): Yeah, yeah. I received my bronze star while I was in 15 months of Iraq from December of 2006 to March of 2008.

(TI): You stayed there for 15 months?

(TH): 15 months my friend. We were initially there for a 12-month deployment; however, we were involuntarily extended due to the surge. And then that's when the leadership change happened with General Petraeus coming over and everything changed it for the better. But, yeah, we were part of that surge part and we're extended an extra three months and while it felt like eternity then, man, I'll tell you what, time has flown by and I'll tell you that is one of the greatest things that I ever did was to be able to lead an organization in a time of combat, ensure the safety and the wellbeing of all of my troops. They all came back the same way that they left and we still talk to this day like we're family.

(TI): Absolutely. What'd you do? What was your role out there as public affairs?

(TH): Well, I was part of the 28 public affairs detachment that we deployed out of Fort Lewis, Washington, the eight person detachment, and we were responsible for all of the internal communications and also any external video usage that the commanders needed to do, whether it was with the media, things of that nature, you know, like with DVIDS and the satellite and things of that nature. We ran point on all of those communication tools. So, it was a great 15-month deployment. We learned a lot, we executed a lot of missions, a lot of us went outside the wire to cover a lot of the missions that our men and women were conducting on the ground. So, definitely an experience that I would never take back and I would do it all over again if I could.

Commented [WN4]: Sounded like "eight person detachment" but wasn't sure because he mentioned 28 earlier.

(TI): Absolutely. Absolutely. Were you a Sergeant at that point? A Staff Sergeant at probably what? 12-year mark? 10-year mark?

(TH): Yeah, I was a Sergeant first class.

(TI): Gotcha, gotcha.

(TH): Yeah, so, I was E 7 Sergeant first class in the army and shortly thereafter, when I came back, I ended up coming to Fort Meade. That's how I ended up here in the Maryland, DC, Virginia area. And then I started teaching at the schoolhouse at the NCO Academy.

(TI): Gotcha. I started my combat camera career in 2007. I came in at 2003, but I started in 2007. So, it sounds like you were there around that same time.

(TH): Yeah, yeah. I was definitely on Fort Meade around the time that you were there. And my combat camera comrades, man, those are some great individuals because obviously, as you know, combat camera and public affairs work hand in hand on various different missions and but yeah, I will say that career field, both yours and mine are some great career fields. You know, my team of soldiers would do everything that they needed to do to ensure our success. And I was just a byproduct of, you know, their success. And I thank them each and every time that I come in contact with them because I wouldn't be as successful as I am even to this present date if it wasn't for those men and women who served underneath me and those who were my superiors there as well, who mentored me along the way.

(TI): That's some good leadership, man. Talk to me about mentors. Give me a best friend or a mentor that you had in your service.

(TH): Yeah. Man, I had quite a few but the one who really, I guess, made the most impact was the one that I had in my last five years of my military career and it happened to be a United States Marine. And I had never worked for Marine, I had never, you know, really come in contact with too many Marines because, obviously, my service be in the United States Army. But Sergeant Major, Brian Battaglia, he was the second ever senior enlisted advisor to the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff. And I was graciously awarded the title of public affairs advisor for him. And we just happened to meet at the right time, and we were able to do some amazing things for the chairman at the time, which was General Dempsey. And, man,

I can tell you that I learned so much from that guy not just from a military leadership standpoint but also from a, you know, man, a husband, a son standpoint as well. He taught me a lot about, you know, selflessness, you know, putting the needs of others first in all things. That's how the mission gets accomplished, because if you take care of your people, if you show them that you care, they will get the job done and they'll go above and beyond and you won't even have to like tell them what to do. And he was able to instill all of those qualities in me and to this day I talked to him at least once a week and even after his retirement of 37 years in the United States Marine Corps, we still chit chat and everything like that. But he also taught me how to play golf too, man, so, I had never held a golf club in my life. And let me tell you what man, when I first started out, I was crap and today I'm just above crap. But, no, he definitely introduced me to a lot of different things, a lot of different people who are still a significant in my professional and personal career. And I definitely thank him for everything he's done for me and my family.

Commented [WN5]: Not sure what he said.

(TI): That's awesome to hear. Good shoutout to the SAR major there. You served a full 20. Why did you decide to get out at 20 and say not 30?

(TH): Yeah. Interesting story, brother. Let me kind of explain it because I would say it's a unique story. It's a story that I won't say I have regret sometimes, but I do tend to look back and say what if?

(TI): Sure.

(TH): But, yeah. At the 18-year mark, my wife unfortunately had received a diagnosis of ovarian cancer. So, we were here in the area and so, she has started receiving treatments from Johns Hopkins. And Johns Hopkins is one of the top cancer treatment facilities in the country. And so, it was amazing to see them do their work and things like that. So, once that occurred, a lot of things in my life kind of changed. And now, the funny part is that, you know, throughout the whole process, come to find out, once she had eventually had the surgery, somehow, some way, the docs could not find the cancer. Now, all the biopsies before and everything like that showed that she had cancer. All the test

results showed that she had cancer. But once again, when it came time to the day of surgery and she and I, and her family are there. They do the surgery and everything and they come out to get us and tell us that, you know, it was just amazing that there was nothing there. But, that was during that timeframe, that lasts two years of my career where I kind of had to make some decisions about, you know, do I start to, you know, make my family the number one priority in my life, or do I continue to ride this military wave? And so, I had to make some hard decisions, man. And one of the hardest decisions I made was that I was actually selected to become a Sergeant major. And I made the list, I was selected, was going to go to school and everything like that and had to decline it. And there's times where I look back and I say to myself, man, you know, what would have happened had I done it? Because it was always a goal of mine to obviously obtain the highest enlisted rank in the, in the United States army. And I just always wanted it and people expected that of me within the army as well. So, when I declined it, man, it was like a whirlwind. Sergeant Major Battaglia at the time, who I talked about earlier, was shocked. He was trying to convince me to kind of rethink my decision. Then he had me go see the Sergeant Major of the army. Sergeant Major army sat down with me and said, "Hey, what can we do to keep you in our ranks?" And I swear, man, it went back and forth for like two, three months.

Commented [WN6]: Is this the right format if someone is describing a conversation they had with someone else?

(TI): That's some pressure right there.

(TH): It is. It is.

(TI): The Sergeant Major of the Joint Chief of Staff and like the Sergeant Major of the army.

Commented [WN7]: Not sure what he said.

(TH): Yes, it is. It is. And then you have your own personal, you know, weights on you. Like, man, you know what? I want to do this; I want to do it. But once again, at some point, we have to understand what's the number one priorities in our life. And like I said, with my wife going through that illness at the time and being able to recover fully, I decided that you know what? 20 years was my time and I had had an outstanding and successful career and learned a lot, and fortunately was able to network with quite a

few folks along the way. So, I felt like a transition, while it would be unclear to me, while it would be new to me, foreign, I felt that I had a good chance to at least transition successfully. And so we decided to stay in the Maryland area and lo and behold, I was able to basically returned back to the Pentagon after I retired and I did public affairs for headquarters department in the army, and then found my way to department of Veterans Affairs working for my former boss, who I served in Iraq with, James Hutton.

(TI): Oh, wow. I didn't know you guys served together.

(TH): Yeah. As a matter of fact, James Hutton was my commander there and Kurt Cashour was there with this as well.

Commented [WN8]: Not sure of the exact spelling of of this person's name.

(TI): Gotcha. Gotcha. I didn't know that part of you guys' history there. Gotcha. You know, I think everybody kind of knows when it's time to go, you know? And I've talked with many guests about, you know, hats off to the people that did 20 with family. And you did that, man, and my hat is off to you. And, you know, I think whether you do 4 years or whether you do 20 years, 30 years, at some point you do have to take the uniform off.

(TH): Without question.

(TI): And you gotta think about that. And you gotta think about what life is going to be like afterwards. And everyone knows when the timing is right.

(TH): Exactly. I kind of relay it to football. You know how you have these athletes, man, who play a sport for several years and, at some point, they're going to have to say goodbye to the sport right? But how do you want to say goodbye to it? Do you want to be carried off the field because you stayed a little too long? Or do you want to go out when you feel like you've peaked or you're at your best? And I one thing I didn't want to do was have the military push me out because I had extended my stay or, you know, I wasn't the same as I was, you know, when I had that energy and that, you know, I was giving my hundred percent. So, I'd rather leave a year or two too early than the stay a year or two too late.

(TI): Sure. Sure. No, I can identify with that completely too. You know, I think I've shared on this podcast before, I had a couple of medical things going on with me, but, you know, I was going to still kick it around. And then one day, I was mentoring I think a Corporal or a Lance corporal and, you know, I still knew what I was talking about even though at that point I was a staff Sergeant, they took the editor from me, they took the camera from me, I was in a management position, I still knew what the heck I was talking about. And I just kind of had this epiphany that I didn't want to be the guy that didn't know what he was talking about at some point, you know, right.

(TH): Right. Right.

(TI): I didn't want the Lance Corporal or the Corporal looking at me like, you don't even know what you're talking about. You know? And I think we've all had those leaders. So, I guess I think everybody knows when it's time to go.

(TH): Yeah and then also another thing that I always thought about is, I always did want to enter the corporate workforce, man, but I always told myself, you know what? I don't want to enter it too late.

(TI): Sure. Sure.

(TH): And I was able to retire fortunately at the age of 37 where I was still somewhat marketable in the corporate world. You know, I didn't want to get out in my fifties, not saying I couldn't have been successful or anything like that, but, when you're competing against a younger workforce,

(TI): That's definitely something you got to consider.

(TH): Yes. It's a little different world. And especially if you haven't been in that world and you're leaving one world that's the military and you kind of go into this unknown world, competition is a beast. So, you gotta know when the timing is right, and I felt that the timing was right at that moment.

(TI): Absolutely. So now you're the Director of Communications and Public Affairs for the entire VFW. So, talk about a right time. You kind of touched on it a little bit, but, what's the full role entail, man?

(TH): Yes. Man, it's a lot going on in my world when it comes to communications and public affairs at the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Give you an example, you know, every piece of legislation that we pushed for through Congress, my hand somehow touches from a strategic communication standpoint. Every time we have an issue, you know, whether it's with veterans or service members, benefits, or it could be, you know, health issues or something going on at their local base or something like that. Some of those issues come across my desk because it may have a national type of flavor to it.

(TI): Yeah.

(TH): But, yeah man, anything that the Veterans of Foreign War does, has some sort of strategic communication messaging behind it. So, you know, I tend to touch it and it has been a blast since I've been there, I got there in October, mid-October of last year. And it's been a learning experience, without question, to understand the dynamics of the organization, the history of the organization. It's the oldest veteran service organization that we have, founded in 1899 and still going strong today. And just to know that Congress, the White House, other departments of the federal agency or the federal government really understand who and what we do is a blessing. So, when the VFW speaks, a lot of people tend to listen. So, that's what I'm happy about that we actually do some true advocacy on behalf of veteran service members and military families.

(TI): I think that's one thing that I think, you know, our older generations had the VSOs, you know, they didn't have all these other nonprofits that we currently have now.

(TH): Right.

(TI): I mean, I think some 40, 50,000 nonprofits. But I think that's the difference between like our legacy ones is, you know, the VFW American Legion and these other nonprofits is that the impact that you guys can have on certain influencers. Is that accurate?

(TH): No, that's totally accurate. I mean, weekly, we all meet, whether that's the DAV, whether that's the American Legion, whether that's AMVETS, we all touch base, man, to ensure that we know what's going on in our worlds and if there's something that we can, you know, I guess a piggyback on to do, that's what we do. Because that's what we're here for is to take care of veterans.

(TI): Absolutely. Have you guys thought about starting a podcast yet? Do you guys have a podcast?

(TH): So, we don't have a podcast, but we thought about starting a podcast and then unfortunately, this pandemic took place.

(TI): Hey, if there's one thing that you can do in a pandemic, it's podcast.

(TH): Without question. No doubt about it because we were going to do a lot of things actually. We were going to set up a media studio at the Washington office at the Veterans of Foreign Wars because we want to capture every time, you know, a key leadership comes through and visits us, whether that's the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Robert Wilkie, who comes and visit us quite often, whether that's under Secretary Paul Lawrence, who comes over and talks to us about veteran benefits and things of that nature, and whether that's our congressional leaders. We want to capture them on camera, we want to be able to send that out to our members and to fellow veterans to better understand what's going on in their world and probably answer a lot of questions that these individuals may have.

(TI): Can't wait to see it, man. Can't wait to see it.

(TH): Looking forward to it.

(TI): Let me know if you need any help.

(TH): Oh, without question. I'll definitely reach out to you.

(TI): You know, me, I always got ideas. Hey, real quick, leaving government service to go into the private or nonprofit sector.

(TH): Yeah.

(TI): I mean, you did that, you know, people think about the government service as a kind of a comfort space. What are some things either tangible or intangible that one needs to consider when making that type of career pivot?

(TH): Yeah. As with anything there's pluses and minuses. And I will say that leaving the federal government was definitely a hard decision. It wasn't one that I didn't take it lightly, you know, I had to weigh everything involved. But, one thing that I will say is that, you have to do what works best for you. And there is opportunities, there's a wealth of opportunities within the federal government to thrive and to, you know, make it to, you know, whatever the heights of your career path may be. But there's going to be some opportunities sometimes outside of the federal government that folks need to really pay attention to. And don't get so caught up in the, well, you know, I've been in this world for so long, I don't want to try something new because you may just miss that opportunity that you've been trying to seek your entire career. And this was just one of those opportunities where it came about that this position opened up and trust me, initially, I was thinking about declining because once again, I was kind of happy with the organization I was with. We had a great team.

(TI): Yeah.

(TH): I loved the mission that we had at the Department of Veterans Affairs and I just enjoyed what I did. But this was an opportunity that I didn't know what lied ahead. You know, I didn't know much about the overall organization. I knew about the VFW, but I didn't know about the, you know, the employment part of it, I didn't know, how their structure was or anything like that. So, what a friend always told me is that you never turned down an

opportunity. And what I mean is that it was an opportunity to go interview. And as you know, an interview goes both ways. I was able to answer all of their questions to see if I was a right fit for them but, on the flip side, I was able to ask my questions to them to ensure that they were the right fit for me. And once that was done, I felt that it was a great opportunity for me to do some unique things. We're trying to do some amazing things at the Veterans of Foreign Wars and we're trying to really make a push for more younger and more diverse veterans, more post 9 11 veterans. And I want to be a part of that push to ensure that, you know, our younger veterans, you know, the veterans in our age group understand the importance behind veteran service organizations like the VFW because if we do not back those organizations who will fight for us on Capitol Hill when we need to have a voice? So, if folks aren't a part of that, you know, unfortunately, those organizations will tend to dwindle away and then the lawmakers will be making decisions on our behalf without our, you know, institutional knowledge or without our input. So, it was an opportunity for me to actually go there and put my stamp on certain things that the VFW that put my input there. And also, the team there is amazing and that was the thing that really triggered it for me because, you know, money comes and goes but at the end of the day it has to be a correct fit for you and, I didn't want to box myself in by just going the federal government route. So, yeah, it was definitely a hard decision, but, uh, it was one that was well worth it.

(TI): I was going to ask you about, you kind of touched on it, but, you know, if you're a veteran, you know the VFW. We've already talked about it, it's established, its legacy, it's entrenched. It's something that I think a lot of nonprofits have, you know, it takes you years to get to where the VFW is in terms of influence and an impact. But what are some things about the VFW that veterans maybe don't know about? What programs have you guys got going on? Efforts, initiatives. Give me some that you've learned since starting your relatively new gig.

(TH): Definitely. I did not know that over the last 60 years, every major piece of legislation that has passed, the VFW has been the lead on. I did not know that we have programs like the Unmet Needs

Program that are similar to like some of the DOD programs, like, you know, Army Emergency Relief or Marine Corps Relief Fund, where veterans or military spouses or service members could apply for and receive financial assistance for hardships. I didn't know you could do that outside of the military, but we have that capacity to do that. I did not know that we have -

Commented [WN9]: Should I put ellipses if he was cut off mid-sentence?

(TI): That's important to know right now.

(TH): Without question. Oh, especially with this pandemic, we have had hundreds of folks contact us for Unmet Needs Program to take advantage of the program because of veterans becoming unemployed or service members currently actively serving, being geographically separated from their loved ones because of the no travel restrictions and now they're living in two separate locations and they can't fund each side. So, we've been able to provide assistance on that. I did not know that folks could contact the VFW for educational scholarships and not just one time, you could contact them every single semester and be awarded the scholarship multiple times to get yourself through school. Did not know that program as well. But yeah, I didn't know that the VFW did so much on the ground for veterans, service members, and military families until I actually got there and learned about the wealth of programs that come along with the organization. And, man, it's definitely a great thing that we do. And I asked, even if you're not a member of the VFW, and this isn't about soliciting or anything like that because that's not what this is about, that's not what we stand for. You know, if you want to join us, please do. If you don't no problem. But, please come to us if you need assistance because that's what we're here for, we're here to take care of veterans, service members, and military families.

(TI): Outstanding. Sounds like a lot of information being passed around at the posts, there.

(TH): No doubt, no doubt. And that's the other thing, you know, when it comes to the VFW, the misconception is that a lot of times, when you think VFW, you think, Oh, the local post where majority guys go to this post to go drink and talk about war stories. That's, that's 10% of the story. You know, that's 10% of who we are. Yes, those

VFW posts exists for comradery. Yes, people can go there to, you know, have a drink or have some food or do some karaoke. No doubt about it.

(TI): Cheap beer too.

(TH): With that question, troops taking care of troops, you know, veterans taking care of veterans, but at the same time, that post is a pillar in its community to give back, to volunteer within the community, to award educational scholarships to middle school and high school students, which we do annually.

(TI): Yeah.

(TH): There's other opportunities for us to engage with the local military facilities to volunteer our times with those units. We have several of our VFW post members who are inside the VA medical facilities and volunteering their time as well there to help fellow veterans. So, yeah, it's just a misconception sometime when you talk about the VFW when you just see the post or you see the old man wearing a hat or whatever the case may be, and you start, you know, thinking one way, but, you know, we're way bigger than that.

(TI): It represents more than that, you know. I really didn't know until I went. I mean, I was still in the Marine Corps and I went to the local post near Jacksonville because they had a Texas Hold'em. So, you walk into Texas Hold'em, you get your \$2 beer and you play poker. And then, through that comradery, you learn about so many of these other things that the VFW is doing.

(TH): Exactly. Exactly.

(TI): I think people just need to actually just step in and check it out.

(TH): Yeah, man, and that's the hardest part, you know? The hardest part is a stepping in and sometimes the hard part is the folks there to welcome the, you know, the younger folks and that's the challenge for us is to be more accommodating to our younger

veterans and our younger veterans, you know, feeling like they, they can be part of this team.

(TI): You gotta bridge that gap. Very good. Other than the VFW, is there a veteran, nonprofit, or individual who you've worked with or you've had experience with whom you'd like to mention?

(TH): Yeah. I can tell you right now that Wounded Warrior Project, are probably one of our biggest supporters. They actually give monies to several of our programs that we have because as you know, the Wounded Warrior Project is probably the biggest one nonprofit when it comes to the veteran community, you know, as far as bringing in dollars and things of that nature and giving back. So, they definitely are a great outlet for our wounded service members, and I will say that, you know, we work hand in hand on as much as we can do for our individuals who are wounded. And the Wounded Warrior Project definitely has our full respects and we work hand in hand as a team.

(TI): Awesome. Terrence, man, it's been great catching up you know. I miss you every day at the office.

(TH): Yeah, man. Great times.

(TI): When we were able to go in the office.

(TH): Hopefully we can get to the office soon, man, because I definitely would love to reconnect with you guys, obviously. I come over there at least once a month for our VSO communicators meeting and that's an outstanding opportunity to meet with several of the key leadership within the VA to discuss what's going on in the department and we're able to pass those messages down to our stakeholders. So, I'm looking forward to getting back to some sort of normalcy to where I can get back over to the department and be able to mingle and discuss various things with some of my friends and colleagues.

(TI): Like wrestling, man, we gotta get back to wrestling.

(TH): Yeah, no doubt. No doubt about it.

(TI): Next year's WrestleMania, we gotta go. We gotta do it.

(TH): All hands-on deck.

(TI): T is there anything else that I missed that you think is important to share to the listeners?

(TH): One thing I do want to share is that, you know, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and myself personally want to thank all of the medical professionals, all of the medical staff, all of the volunteers who are working now and even before this COVID-19 pandemic at our Veterans Affairs medical facilities. It's vital that they understand their value and what they bring to the table. And sometimes it's a thankless job and we apologize that it's that way, but more than ever then before we, you know, we need those individuals, we rely on those individuals, and without those individuals. We wouldn't be able to care for our veterans, our service members, our military families the way we're doing through this pandemic. And also, our fellow Americans, obviously, because the VA has taken on a fourth mission. So, we personally want to thank all of those individuals who are coming in contact with our veterans and our other American citizens during this COVID-19 pandemic to ensure their health, safety, and wellbeing is paramount.

[00:44:04] Music

### **[00:44:44] Closing Monologue:**

(TI): Really, really miss that, dude. I want to thank Terrence for taking the time to link up with us. For more information on Terrence or how to reach him, go to [vfw.org](http://vfw.org) [Link], navigate to media and events, click on media room and finally click on media contacts.

This week's *Borne the Battle* veteran of the week is courtesy of our veteran of the day program. Every day, our VA social media team highlights a veteran on all of our social media platforms and on

blogs.va.gov [Link: <https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/>]. You can nominate a veteran yourself by emailing [newmedia@va.gov](mailto:newmedia@va.gov).

As a native of South-Central Los Angeles, Tanya "Tee" Huling recalled wanting to join the military because her family could not afford to send her to college. Huling's mother was the one who arranged phone calls with a recruiter for the Marine Corps and this led her to serving 20 years of active duty for her country as a legal service specialist from 1987 to 2007. Her tours and deployments include Operation Desert Storm, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation Enduring Freedom. Throughout her service, Huling received numerous awards, including a Meritorious Service Medal, Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal, Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal, Marine Corps Good Conduct Medal, and a Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal. Huling has since earned five college degrees, including a third master's degree in higher education from the Dallas Baptist University. She currently lives in Red Oak, Texas with her husband, two sons, and a daughter. She is a veteran's employer liaison with the Texas Veterans Commission, an organization committed to finding meaningful employment opportunities for the men and women who served in the armed forces. Huling continues to demonstrate, drive and determination on a daily basis through her work with the organization. Tanya Huling, thank you for your 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 send an email to [podcast@va.gov](mailto:podcast@va.gov), include a short writeup, and let us know why you like to see him or her as the *Borne the Battle* veteran of the week.

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Thank you again for listening. And we'll see right here, next week.  
Take care.

[00:47:32] Music

(Text Transcript Ends)

