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Oh, let's get it. Monday, May 24th, 2021. Borne the Battle brought to you by the US Department of Veterans Affairs, the podcast that focuses on inspiring veteran stories and puts a highlight on important resources, offices, and benefits for our Veterans. I'm your host Marine Corps Veteran Tanner Iskra. Whether you're listening on Apple Podcast, iTunes, Spotify, iHeartRadio, or any one of the hundreds of podcasts apps out there, I appreciate you taking the time to tune in from wherever you are out in Podcast Land. I hope you're having a great week. I got to go to Gettysburg for a day for work this week. It was great, but it did take away from my normal production schedule. Coupled with computer issues, thank you, government, getting a new computer. That's another day I lost. It's made our production timeline a little tight this week to say the least. One good thing, over the weekend we were up for an Ambie, which is The Podcast Academy Awards, kind of a big deal. There've been a lot of award shows come and go in the podcast space. There was the iHeartRadio Awards, for example, where everyone could submit, but there was a suspicious amount of iHeartRadio produced podcasts that one. But the Ambies seemed to have buy in from all the major players, all the major podcast production companies in this space. Yeah, which is good. We were the only
government podcast nominated. Ambies is an acronym; don't ask me what for. We were up for the Best Personal Growth and Spirituality Podcast. A bit of a head-scratcher there, as I thought this category was kind of a, I mean, I could see the personal growth part, but it was filled with a lot of the spirituality part of that category. We were competing with meditation podcasts. The Long Island Medium Theresa Caputo was in our category. I don't know. We didn't win, but it was an honor just to be recognized and nominated by the Academy. Many thanks to them for recognizing Borne the Battle so we can help bring and represent the Veteran community in that venue at the first ever Ambies and look forward to it next year. The reason we were able to be there, I think personally, was due to the visibility of the podcast due to your ratings and reviews. So, thank you for that. As far as this week, we did get a couple of ratings, but again, we did not get any new reviews on Apple Podcasts or iTunes. If you're so inclined, please submit a review to Apple Podcasts with your rating, and that not only lets me know how I'm doing in producing your show—it is your show—but the reviews do help bump the show up in the algorithms. And in doing so, you're going to help more Veterans discover this podcast out in Podcast Land and take advantage of all the Benefits Breakdowns, all the interviews, and all the news releases. Speaking of news releases, we got one, and it's a big one this week. Tell every Vietnam Veteran that you know. This one is for the Blue Water Navy Veterans, specifically. It says, "For immediate release: Veterans who were previously denied a service connection for an herbicide related presumptive condition due to lack of in-country Vietnam service will have their claims automatically readjudicated by VA. In April, the department began readjudicating claims for Veterans who served in the offshore waters of the Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam War but were denied for one or more herbicide related conditions on the basis that military service was not performed on the landmass," basically on land of the Republic of Vietnam, "or in its inland waterways. VA will determine if benefits for qualifying disabilities can now be paid retroactively to the date of previously denied claims." That's big. That's huge. Think about it. If your claim was denied 10 years ago, that's big. "The court's decision requires automatic readjudication in such cases without requiring a new claim, and potentially paying benefits to the survivors or estates of deceased beneficiaries. More information is available regarding VA disability benefits based on Agent Orange exposure." And to find that, go to va.gov/disability/hazardous-materials-exposure/agent-orange [Link: va.gov/disability/eligibility/hazardous-materials-
exposure/agent-orange/]. All right. This week is a benefits breakdown. But, Tanner, it's episode 243, it's not on the Pfizer zeros. Yes. Yes, it is. I wanted to get this one in before Memorial Day so you can use this on Memorial Day, if you so choose. The Veterans Legacy Memorial is an online memorial space managed by VA's National Cemetery Administration. The 150 national cemeteries that they manage have been extended into an online memorialization for each one of the 3.7 million Veterans interred in those cemeteries. Each Veteran has a digital memorial space in the Veterans Legacy Memorial, and they have a profile page there for each one of those Veterans. How can you use it? Can you leave a comment? Can you leave a photo especially on Memorial Day? Army Veteran James LaPaglia of the National Cemetery Administration is going to break it all down for you right now. Enjoy.

[00:05:52] Music
[00:05:59] Interview:

**Tanner Iskra (TI):** James, I saw you got a mass communications degree from University of Florida.

**James LaPaglia (JL):** Yeah. Are you a Gator?

**(TI):** I am not. I was almost a Gator. [Laughter] Florida and Arizona State were my two final choices when I finished my degree in mass communications.

**(JL):** Okay. So, you went to ASU or?

**(TI):** What's that?

**(JL):** Did you decide to go to Arizona instead?

**(TI):** I did. Yeah.

**(JL):** All right.

**(TI):** What do you call it? They gave me more credits when I got out.

**(JL):** Yeah. [Laughter] In my day it was a party school. So hopefully that was a good choice for you.

**(TI):** Well, it was online.

**(JL):** Okay. [Laughter] Hopefully it was a party online for you.

**(TI):** Oh, yeah. Every night after work. A big party. Big party. Well, I appreciate you coming here on Borne the Battle. It took a minute, but we finally got our schedules to lineup. So, I appreciate you
sitting down and talking about the Veterans Legacy Memorial with the podcast.

(JL): Yeah, my pleasure.

(TI): Air Force Veteran yourself. First question we always ask is: when and where did you know that military service was going to be the next step in your life?

(JL): Yeah, so it was—it's kind of in my family generations back to the Civil War of military service. In my own experience, my grandfather was in the Army Air Corps. My dad was an Air Force Academy grad and in the Air Force. And I kind of followed in his footsteps, you know. And I have a brother who did the same, so it's kind of runs in our family.

(TI): Okay. Okay. Were you a public affairs combat camera your entire career?

(JL): Yeah, I was a public affairs officer for almost my entire career in the Air Force, which was a little over 20 years.

(TI): Oh, wow. Any time overseas? Did you deploy at all?

(JL): Yeah. In fact, I think most of my time in the Air Force was overseas in Europe, the Pacific, and I did deploy. I was deployed to Kuwait and Iraq in 2003 right at the beginning.

(TI): Wow, yeah. What was communications like out there? Because I know when I got out there and—I wasn't combat camera at the time, but when I got out there in 2005, you know—internet, there was no internet. There was no connectivity for, like, video chatting or anything like that. That wasn't a thing back then. So, getting imagery from and getting messaging from country into the public was probably a little different than it is today.

(JL): I think so. We—those of us who were the initial public affairs cadre that went up to Baghdad in 2003—we were attached to the State Department folks. And so, you know, we moved right into the Republican Palace. I don't remember the connectivity being that bad. I, you know, they're—we're connected on email. I'm not sure about large file sizes, but we had email, and phone was a little sketchy. You know, we were, begging satellite phones from each other to make morale calls. Yeah, it must be quite different now with the intercon connectivity that we have.
Yeah, I was thinking about, like, trying to get video files from—I know I've talked to a lot of combat camera guys that served back then and to get video files from Iraq to like CNN or JCCC, you know, Joint Combat Camera, at the time it was a little difficult for them. While you were in, who was either your best friend or your greatest mentor?

So, my greatest mentor was a public affairs officer herself. I was a young baby Lieutenant. She was a gruff, chain-smoking Lieutenant Colonel in Public Affairs. And she took me under her wing. She was truly a mentor. I mean, she championed me. She gave me a kick in the butt when I needed it. It was a person who I felt safe with to talk about, you know, what I might've been experiencing or, you know, how I was growing from, you know, a baby Lieutenant into a real leader. And so, she, you know, to this day, I occasionally still ask myself, “What would she do in this situation?” And so, she definitely had an impact, not only on my military career, but still now in my professional life.

Can you give me an example of something she taught you?

Yeah. She had a top 10 list that she provided to me and other folks who she was mentoring, and it had things on, you know, “Be honest. Be responsive. Follow through.” I can't list all of them, but I think I still have it somewhere in my pile of memories. But that, you know, I used to keep that top 10 list in my office, you know, taped up or somewhere where I could see it, you know, if I wanted to be like her, right. To be like my mentor, you know, this is what I needed to do.

Very good. Very good. When did you decide to get out and come work for VA? Was it a natural transition or was there some bumps in the road? How did you get to the Veterans Affairs from the Air Force?

Yeah, so I left the Air Force because of “Don't ask, don't tell.” And so that was obviously a challenging time for me. And so, when I left the Air Force, I did a little consulting work first for Booz Allen. And then I got into federal service. I worked for the Department of the Army. Then I went to Social Security Administration, Health and Human Services, and finally landed at VA about four years ago. It's been an amazing experience for the last four years. I started off in the Secretary's Office, did a little stint over in IOT, and now I've been here at the National Cemetery Administration for about a year and a half.
TI: Gotcha. As a Veteran, what does it feel for you to come work for a mission like the mission that the department has?

JL: I think it's more emotionally valuable than other jobs that I've held, you know, in other agencies because I feel that sense of connectedness with the customer, right? Because not only am I a Veteran, but, you know, those who we serve are Veterans. And so, there's that emotional value to my work that I otherwise might not have. And so, the closer I can be to that connectedness to a Veteran in my daily work, the more rewarding it is for me. I mean, not everything that I do is directly connected to a Veteran, but a lot of what I do is and that's what we're talking about today. And so you know that—

TI: But it's 100% Veteran focused no matter what you do cause that's the mission.

JL: It's true. Yeah. I mean, we all support Veterans. Not all of us have a direct connection on a daily basis with the customer, right?

TI: You're not, you know, like a doctor seeing Veterans every day. You're kind of behind the scenes working for a program for Veterans.

JL: Yes, that's true. Yeah. I don't have face to face contact with Veterans, but I interact with Veterans occasionally on this program. I interact with survivors and family members, as well, which is a valuable experience too, because they're also our customers.

TI: Absolutely. Okay, so like you said, you've worked at a couple of different positions within VA. You're now the Program Officer for the Veterans Legacy Memorial. Overall, what is the Cemetery Administration trying to achieve with this site?

JL: Yeah, the mission of the Veterans Legacy Memorial is to ensure that the legacies of our Veterans continue even after they pass away. We, you know, when a Veteran dies, what we don't want to happen is to have their story not be told anymore or to have their name not be spoken anymore. And so, VLM was designed and launched to preserve the legacies of Veterans so that family members and survivors can continue to tell their story and continue to talk about their military service to their country and into their life. And it's an amazing online platform to be able to keep those legacies alive.
(TI): It kind of reminds me—and I've played on it a little bit—but it kind of reminds me of a Facebook for those that are no longer with us the way it's kind of built out now.

(JL): Yeah, it has some attributes that would be common to social media platforms. It is different than what we would consider a social media platform. I mean, it's not a first amendment arena where people can say and write and submit whatever they want. I mean, it's a moderated platform where, you know, every submission is reviewed by the VLM moderator to make sure that it conforms to our user policy and that it appropriately honors Veterans. So, it's a little different in that respect, but some of the functions clearly are the same. You know, the tributes feature that we currently have is much like you would have on Facebook or Twitter where you can put comments. Some of the features that we are turning on for Memorial Day will even look more similar to some of the other features that one might see on a social platform.

(TI): Yeah. Really surprised to see that, you know, I logged into it about, you know, I think when you guys first launched to where you are now, it seems like there's a lot of functionality that has changed on the site itself. A couple of things I noticed that have changed, you know, when I clicked on a name, you got the basics like the date of birth, death, service, photo of the marker—that hasn't changed. By the way, who's taking all those photos? All those marker photos?

(JL): Yeah. So, there's another project within NCA. Another IT related project, which for a couple of years has been going around to all our cemeteries, our VA National Cemeteries, taking photos of the headstone or markers, planting a stick in the ground there where they can get the latitude longitude, and that's put into a separate database. And then VLM sucks in that image and that mapping information in order to put the image on a Veteran's page or to create the Bing map of where the Veteran is within the cemetery and provide step-by-step directions, just like you would with any other mapping service. So, we have about half of our profiles that have those images because that project continues. Not just the contract to take images and get the lat-long for existing interments, but you know, we're, we're having interments happen, you know, today and every day, you know, in the future. And so, cemeteries are starting to have their own equipment to take those pictures themselves. So, you know, we'll continue to suck in as many photos are in that other database and put them on our pages.
Yeah, I noticed the Bing map. The fact that you can—when you go to a lot of them, you can actually go and there's the—it has the marker, you know, and it has it, you know, right on the map. And so, it's like, okay, it's got the actual location. I think that was really cool. Other things that are on there: cemetery location, date of interment, like you said, people can leave comments. The other functionality I noticed was the ability to add photos and add historical documentation. You talked a little bit about it, but how—what is the review process like for people that do submit stuff for the Veteran that they love?

Yeah. So first of all, you mentioned that, you know, when you pull up a page, you see the information that we're pulling from an NCA database, right? You see the date of birth, the date of death, if the Veteran has an emblem of belief that will be displayed, all their service information, you know, their rank, their service branch will be displayed. And right now, people can submit tributes or comments. That's really the only thing that people can submit today. As we approach Memorial Day, we're going to be turning on a lot of other features, which will allow them to submit photographs, historical documents, biographical information, and other pieces of content. And once those are submitted, whether it's a tribute today or whether as we get near to Memorial Day, it's an image or a document, that submission goes into a dashboard that me and my team manage. And each one of those submissions is reviewed, you know, every single comment that is submitted is reviewed by a human and determined whether or not it complies to—

Is that a big team?

The team that we have that reviews it is or has the ability to review the dashboard is not a huge team. It's a mix of contractor and government personnel who have the ability to go in and review those comments. Right now, we're not having any issue keeping up with the volume. Even when we surge like over Memorial Day last year or Veteran's Month last year, you know, we plan for those kinds of surges, so that we have the staff to do it. So, when a moderator looks at a submission, you know, it's pretty easy to determine whether it complies with the user policy and whether it honors Veterans. You know, there's categories that we specifically look for that may cause us to reject a submission. You know, if people put in PII such as phone numbers or street addresses, we won't approve it. If people wrote in foul language, you know, we typically won't approve those either. You know, if it's an
advertisement or marketing or something political in nature, you know, we have a list of things that we look for, but frankly that has been very, very, very small numbers. You know, we have more than 10,000 tributes that have been posted to date since last Memorial Day when we turned on the feature. And I think today we have around 70 that have been rejected. So that's just an extremely small fraction of items that the moderators have felt did not comply with the user policy. And sometimes it's not related to something that might not honor Veterans. Sometimes it's a link that doesn't work or it's just characters that don't make any sense. And, you know, someone submitted something or, you know, it's not always something bad. It's just something that might not work or, you know, might be—

(TI): It could be an emoji that just doesn't display right or something like that.

(JL): Yes.

(TI): Gotcha. Gotcha. Okay. So, you got big plans for this upcoming Memorial Day weekend. I'll make sure that this posts before that.

(JL): Yeah. The ideal time, Tanner, is the week of May 24th. That's the week before Memorial Day weekend. That would be the ideal time.

(TI): May 24th. May 24th. Okay. I got to check the calendar. I do have some other benefits breakdowns, but I'm gonna try to make that, or we just might make this a bonus. I don't know. We'll figure it out. We'll get it in.

(JL): All right.

(TI): Okay.

(JL): Before we move on to talk about Memorial Day, if I can talk a little bit about the types of content that we're seeing?


(JL): Because it's what we see from the users who are telling stories or sharing memories is we're seeing a lot of emotion. We're seeing comradery. We're seeing grief. You know, if you go on as a user and you put in a comment right now for a Veteran or maybe a couple of Veterans that you know, the experience that you're going to have as a user is really just those couple of Veterans that you're looking at, right? But for those of us who have been moderating these comments the past year and seeing them as they come into
the dashboard and reviewing them, it's an amazing experience to see the overwhelming response and what people want to say about their Veteran. And the details of their lives and the aspects of not only their military service, but their relationships to family members and battle buddies. It's just wonderful and emotional. And I think my fellow VLM moderators have shared the same thing that, you know, at times it will get you misty-eyed to look at what is coming across the dashboard because it is so personal. And it is exactly what we have wanted it to be, which is, you know, sharing the legacy of those Veterans. And we're so excited, you know, to be coming up on a Memorial Day this year and having other items to be added to the content mix, like images and documents. And, I think the images in particular, the ability for people to submit images, is going to just increase that storytelling experience, you know, not just for the user and their family and their friends and survivors, but for those of us who are seeing it come across.

(TI): Sure. I can only imagine what kind of experience that is to have that job to be a moderator like that. It's pretty incredible. Are you—what do you guys—I mean have you guys seen stuff like people that haven't seen each other since the time that they served find their friends or?

(JL): It's a mix. We do see tributes posted on pages that say, “Hey, Uncle Dan, I never knew you, but I heard stories about you and your military service, and I'm so grateful.” Or we'll see tributes that—from people that had a relationship with the Veteran up until their death, you know, whether it's a spouse or a daughter or son or brother or mother and father. I mean, it's a wide swath of relationships and how they knew it. And do you see, not only family members chime in, but you do see colleagues that chime in and talk about their experiences together at a particular location. And when people do went through together, right—their shared experiences. We do see connections to other issues that the VA is working on. We see posts about PTSD, traumatic brain injury, other health issues, you know, that other parts of the VA are actively working, right? We see those connections to current events that, you know, our Veterans are struggling with and that the VA is helping with. So, it's a wide swath of information and sharing your stories. Yeah, it's not always positive and it wasn't meant to be that kind of platform. You know, this is a platform where we want to honor Veterans and tell their stories, and some stories are painful. Some stories are joyful, right? It's a mix.
Very good. Very good. The basic question, right? So, how can people access the site? [Laughter]

That was in my notes in my mind as I'm like, “I gotta remember to say the website.” So, it's really easy to remember. Because the website is www.va.gov/remember [Link: va.gov/remember].

That's pretty easy.

It is easy to remember. So, that's the fastest way to get to the site. It's easy to search for a Veteran. There's a simple search. You just search by first name, last name. You can search by war period. You can add a filter for the cemetery that the Veteran is in. And there's an advanced search where you can add things like a decoration that might be on their record or other filters that you can search for a Veteran. I will say that it's important to know that right now, VLM is only those Veterans who are interred at VA National Cemeteries. It's about 3.75 million Veterans that have VLM pages within VLM. And that—and again, that's for Veterans interred in VA National Cemeteries only. We do plan on trying to bring in other records, you know, whether those are records from state and tribal VA cemetery scattered around the country.

Aren’t you talking about state VAs? You guys—

State—we’re already looking into the, you know, how we can bring those records in and have pages for those Veterans within VLM? There are cemeteries that are managed by the military. There are cemeteries managed by the park service. There are cemeteries managed by the American Battle Monuments Commission. And, of course, we have Veterans buried in thousands of private cemeteries everywhere, but our goal is eventually to have a page for every Veteran no matter where that Veteran has been laid to rest. So, that's something that will take time, but we do hope to start bringing through other types of cemetery records even as early as later this year.

Well, I think once the word gets out really gets out, once people are really submitting stuff, once people are really talking about it, I'm sure that'll help push that agenda. Yeah. Cause I—like you talked about, some are managed by the DOD. I don't think many people realize that Arlington is managed by the Department of Defense, not by the Department of Veterans Affairs. So, if you're looking for Audie Murphy or Joe Lewis cause I typed in Joe Lewis and that
was the first thing I noticed. I was like, “Oh Arlington. Yeah. Department Defense.”

(JL): Right. Actually, just Department of the Army. Yeah. So, Arlington is an Army managed cemetery, and, obviously, you know, the most famous of national cemeteries that we have. There’s a lot of notable people interred there. So, yeah. That will be one of the cemeteries that, you know, we would like to bring those records into VLM eventually.

(TI): That’d be outstanding. Is there any plans to make this into an app as we’re moving into a more mobile society?

(JL): Yeah. We actually have that as a requirement that we’d like to tackle to create a mobile site for it. I think you’re talking about an app, not necessarily a mobile site. We do—

(TI): Yeah. Like it’s something that’s like on an app or a tablet or a Roku or something.

(JL): So, we do have a plan to turn VLM into a mobile site as well. I mean, it is responsive to a device right now. So, if you have a smaller screen, if you have an iPad or an iPhone, the website is responsive to a smaller screen and you can use it. But we are looking at, you know, how can we, no kidding, make it into a mobile site, you know, specifically designed for those types of devices.

(TI): Very good. Very good. Okay. Let’s talk about Memorial Day. You talked about new functionality. What’s coming up both, I guess, within the Veterans Legacy Memorial for Memorial Day, and then I guess, you know, things have got to be changing within cemetery administration for COVID. You know, what’s changed? And what are you guys planning to do as an administration for Memorial Day weekend?

(JL): Yeah. Let’s talk about the COVID-19 piece because that the—you know, I’ll go backwards for a little bit. Last Memorial Day, we launched the tribute feature, which was really the first interactive way to use VLM is to, you know, have users submit comments, which we call tributes. And we did that very intentionally during that time because, you know, it was the height of the pandemic. People couldn’t necessarily go to VA National Cemeteries to be part of a memorial service. I mean, there was a time when we were not doing committal services. We were doing direct interments, and we were limiting it to a certain number of people only. And there were social distancing rules in place at the time. And so, we launched the
tribute feature intentionally to allow survivors and family members to be able to virtually honor their Veteran even as they couldn't physically go to the cemetery. And, you know, usually over Memorial Day at our VA National Cemetery, there's huge ceremonies. The Scouts are there putting flags on to each of the headstone markers. You know, people are going to visit their Veterans. You know, that's what we do on Memorial Day, right? We remember. And so, by and large, we couldn't do that last year. So, we intentionally launched the tributes feature because we wanted to provide that opportunity, and we found that people did use it. And then we did see, you know, tributes come across that talked about COVID-19, you know, talked about, “Hey, you know, I couldn't come to see you this weekend because of COVID-19, but I just wanted to remember you.” So, you know, we of course are still in the pandemic. And so, you know, as we approach Memorial Day this year, you know, there still may be some restrictions on activities at our national cemeteries. And if there are, you know, VLM is still that virtual platform that will let people honor their Veteran even if they can't, again, perhaps go to the VA National Cemetery. So, that has definitely played a role in the timing of, you know, the feature that we rolled out last year. And I think this year as we provide even more interactivity, it'll allow people who, for whatever reason, COVID related or not, can't make it to where their Veteran is. So, we're excited about the new features. You know, it's really making the site content. It's just going to explode the types of content that people can submit for a Veteran. So, you know, we talked about images and, you know, and our customers have been asking this. You know, we have a customer support team that takes questions from users and helps them find their Veteran and—

(TI): Is that on the VLM website? Is that on the VLM website, the customer support?

(JL): Yes. Yeah. If you're a user and you go to our VLM website, you can click over to customer support.

(TI): I'll make sure that I put all the links and everything on the blog on blogs.va.gov [Link: blogs.va.gov]. So, when this episode comes up, it comes up.

(JL): Yeah. There's a specific email address for customers support. So, yeah, there is. And one of the things that we hear a lot from customers is, you know, “When can I start putting images up?” You know, and so that's something we've been working on for awhile.
And, you know, it's very exciting that we're gonna be able to offer that as we approach Memorial Day. And people will be able to not only submit photos with their tribute or with their comment, much like they would with Facebook, right, where you can submit photos with your text, but they can submit standalone photos that will be displayed and kind of have an image library. And they can put captions in. And so, we're very excited about the image one. We think that will be very popular with users. But there's a whole slew of other content types that we're gonna be opening up to users. We're going to allow them to submit longer length biographies for their Veterans. So, if they want to, you know, put a page or two of information that summarizes the Veteran's life, they can submit that. If they want to create a timeline of a Veteran's service and say, “Okay, you know, during these days, this Veteran was stationed at these installations or on these ships. And on these— during these dates the Veteran got, you know, this service award or that service award or decoration.” You know, once those are approved by the moderators, it'll display that whole timeline in chronological order on the Veteran's page. So, it kind of summarizes, you know, their military service.

(TI): Through where they do the data ranks, so even a more expanded version of that. That's pretty cool.

(JL): Yeah. So, and those fields for the timelines are flexible enough. You know, people can put in, you know, “received a bronze star” and the dates that the bronze star was received. Or “earned my degree through, you know, this military institution.” Or, you know, “got this certificate of chain.” I mean, it really is flexible enough to allow for whatever users are submitting. Another content type that we're opening up are documents. You know, people can submit PDFs. And they'll reside in another tab on the page is kind of a document repository. So, a couple examples are award citations. So, if you have an award citation for a Defense Meritorious Service Medal, you know, users can scan that in as a PDF and upload it to the site. And then we'll talk about, you know, what that Veteran did to earn that particular declaration. It could be newspaper clippings. It could be an obituary. So, you know, the amount of content that we're opening up for users is just increasing exponentially.

(TI): Sounds like every year you're looking for a different functionality, different thing to do. I really think that's really—I think that's really cool because if say there's a student out there looking to find a great story or a journalist that's looking to find a great story on a
Veteran or something, this can be a complete repository for that. That is outstanding.

(JL): And we're not only, you know, requesting that users submit content, you know, within NCA, within the National Cemetery Administration, we also have content on certain Veterans. You know, our historians have information that may be on a particular Veteran, lots of particular Veterans. Our Veterans Legacy Program which works with universities and students to do research on Veterans and their stories. You know, we have a lot of that information in-house. So, we—and at NCA we'll be adding that information to Veteran pages as well. So, it's, you know, it's not just something that we're offering to users, it's something that we're using ourselves to try to try to tell that story.

(TI): NCA being the National Cemetery Administration, not everyone that listens to this understands those acronyms.

(JL): Yeah, I'm going to try—yeah, Thanks for the reminder about acronyms.

(TI): Not a big deal.

(JL): Yeah. There's one other feature coming for Memorial Day I wanted to mention if I could. So--

(TI): Yeah, absolutely!

(JL): We've created the ability for users to follow a Veteran within VLM.

(TI): Oh, so if anybody gets like a notification? If somebody would get a notification of something that was updated on that?

(JL): Yeah. Yes. So, you know, come Memorial Day, you'll see a button under at the top of a Veteran's page that says "Follow this Veteran." And if a user clicks on that, you know, whenever content is added to that page, by whatever user, right—whoever's following that Veteran will get an email alert saying that, you know, "Content's been added to this Veteran's page. Here's the hyperlink." And so, they can keep track of what is being shared about their Veteran. So, we're excited about that as well. We think that that will, you know, allow people to stay connected to specific Veterans.


(JL): Not a Google alert, an email alert.
An email alert. I mean, similar type of thing.

Yeah. Yeah, right.

Very cool. Okay, James, we covered a little bit of ground. Is there anything about the Veterans Legacy Memorial that I have not asked that you think is important to share?

Yeah. So, you can see me looking through my notes and make sure I cover everything. You know, there is one thing I wanted to share about, you know, how users can experience VLM. So, anybody can use VLM either to view what's on a Veteran's page or to submit content. You know, what we ask for when users submit content is their name and their email address. We also offer people the ability to log in as a member of VLM, and they would just need to have an ID.me account, which—that the VA uses for lots of other apps and other agencies use as well. If you are logged in member, you don't have to use your—you don't have to submit your email address and your name every time. It will recognize you. So, if you're using VLM frequently or on a Veteran's page frequently and submitting stuff, it might be valuable for a user to create an ID.me account and log in as a member. We do offer the ability to like, you know, an image or tribute, you know. Similar to like you would like something on a social media platform. And only logged in members can like something on the platform. But by and large, you know, submitting content for a Veteran and being able to utilize the other features you don't need to be a member. You'll just need to, you know, submit your email address and name every time so we have a record of who submitted the content. So, I did want to mention that, you know, the usability of VLM. So, I think that's important for users. So, what would I leave folks with about VLM? I would say that first of all, this is a platform for all of us to share the stories and memories of those who we love, those Veterans who have sacrificed for their country. And it's not—it doesn't have to even be a Veteran that you're associated with. It could be a total stranger who you have done research on or is connected to your community or to your VFW chapter. You know, it might be a colleague that you're interested in. But it's an opportunity to stay connected to the Veteran community even after a Veteran has passed and to share those stories so that those stories continue to be told. I mean, what we don't want, again, is for people to forget the names of these Veterans or to forget their story, and this is a way to ensure that their legacies stay alive.
I was a Gunner’s Mate, Tonkin Gulf.

Logistics, Ramstein.

Medic, Kandahar

As a Veteran, it doesn't matter when or where you served—

Infantry, Camp Pendleton.

—or what you did. The VA has benefits that may be useful to you right now. See what VA can do for you. To learn what benefits you may be eligible for, visit www.va.gov [Link: www.va.gov]. That’s www.va.gov.

I want to thank James for taking the time to come on Borne the Battle and breaking down the Veterans Legacy Memorial. You can sign up to start submitting your own mementos, your own comments at vlm.cem.va.gov [Link: vlm.cem.va.gov]. And I look forward to seeing all the different comments, photos, mementos that you're going to leave for those Veterans. This week's Born the Battle Veteran of the Week was written in by one of our listeners via email to podcast@va.gov. Paul writes in, “I would like to nominate US Army Veteran Peter Conover Haines for Veteran of the Week. He was my great, great grandfather. I enjoy your podcast. Keep up the good work.” I appreciate that, Paul. Peter Haines graduated from the US Military Academy in June of 1861 as an artillery officer commanding Alpha Battery of the 2nd Field Artillery at Bull Run in July of 1861. He had the distinction of firing the first gun to signal the begin of the battle. So, he fired the first canon of the first major battle of the Civil War. It's amazing. He then went on to participate in many engagements during the Civil War. Haines was commended for gallant and meritorious action during the battle of Hanover Courthouse, Virginia in May of 1862. The demand for engineer officers did cause his transfer to engineers in July of 1862. During the Siege of Vicksburg from May 18th to July 14th of 1863, he served with distinction as an engineer for XIII Corp. And if you know anything about that battle, engineering was a huge part of that siege. Peter Haines remained in the Army following the Civil War and was promoted to Major in September of 1870. His post-
During the Civil War time was spent on numerous public engineering projects involving rivers and harbors. He also designed and constructed a number of important lighthouses along the East Coast. Two of which, the Morris Island, South Carolina and the St. Augustine, Florida lighthouses, remain standing. This guy gets around. Peter Haines is best known for the reclamation of the Potomac flat swamp in Washington, DC in the 1880s. His design of the tidal basin in Washington DC solved the drainage problems of the foul smell of most of the Washington area marshlands while also improving traffic ability on the Potomac river. I wish he was there now to talk about the traffic that we got in DC. I digress. In recognition of his work, the tip of East Potomac Park is named Haines Point, and I've ran there many times. I even ran a POT there when I was in the Marine Corps. During the Spanish-American War, Peter Haines deployed to Puerto Rico in 1898, where he commanded troops at Guayama and Los Palmas. And I hope I said those right. From 1899 to 1904, Peter Haines worked on the Canal Commission and was influential in choosing of the Panama route rather than through Nicaragua, which was popular at the time. He retired on July 6, 1904 at the rank Brigadier General. So, he was in throughout this entire time incredible. However, in recognition of his exceptional services to the country, a special act of Congress elevated him to Major General on the retired list in 1916. A great need for qualified officers to serve in World War I caused Haines to be recalled to active duty in September of 1917. At the age of 77, Major General Haines served one year as Chief Engineer of the eastern United States. His final retirement was in September of 1918. Peter Haines died at Walter Reed Hospital in 1921 and is buried in Arlington National Cemetery. That is a gentleman that I wish I had the opportunity to interview. What a hell of a life, Army Veteran Peter Haines. We honor his service. That is 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. Include a short writeup, just like Paul did, and let us know why you’d like to see him or her as the Borne the Battle Veteran of the Week. And if you liked this podcast episode, hit the subscribe button. We're on iTunes, Spotify, Google Podcast, iHeartRadio, pretty much any podcasting app, notebook, phone, computer, tablet known to man. For more stories on Veterans and Veteran benefits, check out our website blogs.va.gov [Link: blogs.va.gov]. And follow the VA on social media: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube—which there is a whole playlist of Born the Battle on there—RallyPoint, LinkedIn, Pinterest.
DPTVetAffairs, US Department of Veterans Affairs, no matter the social media, you can always find us with that blue check mark. And, as always, I'm reminded by people smarter than me to remind you that the Department of Veterans Affairs does not endorse or officially sanction any entities that may be discussed in this podcast nor any media products or services they may provide. I say that because the song you're hearing now is called "Machine gunner," which is courtesy of the non-profit Operations Song. And it was written by Marine Veteran Mick McElhenny, Nashville songwriter Jason Sever, and Mykal Duncan. Thank you again for listening and we'll see you right here next week. Take care.

[0:49:29] Music

(Text Transcript Ends)